

# Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF  
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JULY-AUGUST 1993

JUST RETURNED FROM AUSTRALIA

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FIFTEEN THOUSAND MILES BY LAND EXHIBITING IN OVER ONE HUNDRED OF THE LEADING CITIES AND TOWNS IN AUSTRALIA.



# BANDWAGON

## The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

Vol. 37, No. 4

July-August 1993

### FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

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Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor

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### THIS MONTH'S COVER

Following their return from Australia in 1892 the Sells brothers added "Just Returned From Australia" to a number of posters designs they used the previous year, although the boat litho on this month's cover was a new design for the 1892 season. The original is from the Pfening Archives.

The Kansas portion of the 1892 Sells tour is covered in the Orin King installment in this issue.

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FINANCIAL STATEMENT May 1, 1992 to April 30, 1993

Cash beginning 5-1-92	13,784.38
Income	44,196.12
Expense	38,014.48
Cash 5-1-93	<u>6,181.64</u>
	19,966

Receipts	
Dues	27,428.50
Subscriptions	2,856.00
Back Issue Sales	1,455.45
Advertising	5,244.50
1992 Convention and Auction	6,113.75
Bank Interest	<u>1,097.92</u>
Total	44,196.12

Expenses	
Bandwagon printing	29,342.10
Bandwagon postage	3,075.00
Bandwagon mailing prep	1,010.06
Bandwagon misc. expense	170.00
Refunds, subscriptions and advertising	275.00
Secretary-Treasurer expenses	70.00
Convention expenses	3,366.05
Dues notice printing	549.27
Bank service charges, foreign exchange	<u>157.00</u>
Total	<u>38,014.48</u>
	6,181.64

Submitted by Dale C. Haynes, Secretary-Treasurer



*This article was inspired by a paper presented at the 1993 CHS convention by Fred Dahlinger covering early photos of the Ringling show. He provided extensive material for this article from the files of the Circus World Museum.*

**A**lbert, Alf T., Charles and John Ringling first toured a hall show in 1882 called the Ringling Bros. Classic and Comedy Concert Co. The show opened on November 27, 1882 and closed on February 3, 1883. Brother Otto joined for the next tour which opened on March 12 and closed on April 27, 1883. The title was changed to Ringling Bros. Grand Carnival of Fun when it reopened on August 20, 1883. The Carnival closed on April 11, 1884.

The Yankee Robinson and Ringling Bros. Great Double Shows, Circus and Caravan opened in Baraboo, Wisconsin on May 19, 1884. The boys hired Fayette "Yankee" Robinson to use his name. Robinson died on August 25, 1884 at age sixty-six.

In 1884 John was 18 years old; Charles was 20; Otto was 26; Alf. T. was 23; and Albert was 32. The show traveled on nine wagons. With no bandwagon the parade was made on foot. The big top was 45 by 90 feet. The side show was 30 x 45 feet. The circus had seventeen employees plus the brothers. Bob Mach was the agent. Admission to the big show was 25 cents. The company played in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and Illinois closing in Benton, Wisconsin on September 27. They toured their Carnival of Fun in halls from November 12, 1884 until March 14, 1885 and reopened it on April 6, closing on May 5, 1885.

The Ringling Bros. Great Double Shows, Circus, Caravan and Trained Animal Exposition opened the 1885 season in Baraboo on May 18. A bandwagon was added for the parade. The big top was an 80 foot round top and the side show was 30 x 50 feet. The show traveled on twelve wagons not including the side show and privileges. On July 27 John went on the advance. After the season closed on October 3 in Fort Dodge, Iowa the brothers went to Janesville, Wisconsin where they bought two cages, an advance wagon and some wardrobe, possibly from Burr Robbins. The hall show was toured from November 12, 1885 to January 30, 1886. It reopened on March 2, 1886 and closed on April 23.

The 1886 circus season opened on May 15 using the title Ringling Bros. Great Double Shows and Congress of Wild and Trained Animals. The show was enlarged using a 90 foot big top. A 30 foot middle was added on July 3. The side show top

# RINGLING BROS. WORLD'S GREATEST RAILROAD SHOWS

## THE 1890-1891 SEASONS

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

was 75 by 45 feet. There were eighteen wagons including two cages, a ticket wagon and a bandwagon. Henry Ringling joined his brothers in show closed on October 9. During the latter part of the tour fourteen head of stock were lost to glanders disease. The hall show toured from November 24, 1886 to April 5, 1887, with a break from December 29 to March 14.

Herald used by the first Ringling show in 1884. Circus Galleries Ringling Museum of Art.

In 1887 the show grew in size and in length of the title. The Ringling Bros. Monster Shows, Great Double Circus, Royal European Menagerie, Museum, Caravan and Congress of Trained Animals open in Baraboo on May 7. The big top remained the same size. The side show, or museum as it was called, was 45 by 55. A 70 foot round top was added for the menagerie. The show had five cages, a ticket wagon, a bandwagon, two advance wagons and sixty horses. The menagerie included a camel, an elk, a bear, two lions, a kangaroo, a hyena, birds, monkeys, a deer and four Shetland ponies. The season closed on

October 22. Two hall units were toured during the winter.

The 1888 circus season opened on May 5 as Ringling Bros. Stupendous Consolidation of Seven Monster Shows. The big top was 100 by 148 feet. The menagerie was 70 by 100 feet and the side show was 40 by 50 feet. Horse and dressing tops were added. The show acquired its first two elephants that season, Babylon (Babe) and Fanny. Mickey Mann was the first Ringling elephant man. Eighty horses moved the show. For the first time the big show went to a fifty cent admission, with children at

twenty-five cents.

After opening on May 5 the show found a very wet spring, with no sun for the first four weeks. Business was so bad

the price was dropped to twenty-five cents. By June 5 business improved and the season overall was a winner. The show closed on October 12. A new ring barn and an animal house were built during the winter. The circus came of age and no more hall shows were toured.

In 1889 the circus was billed as Ringling Bros. and Van Amburgh's United Monster Circus, Museum, menagerie, Roman Hippodrome and Universal World's Fair. Hyatt Frost was paid for the use of the Van Amburgh name. A third elephant, Jewell (Juliet), was bought from the Forepaugh show.

The Ringlings also bought equipment from Thomas L. Grenier who had traded his Chicago supper club to Burr Robbins for his circus property in late 1887. The 1888 season was enough of circus business Grenier and he began selling the Robbins property.

It appears Grenier sold the Ringlings a green bandwagon and the Neptune tableau in the spring of 1889. The bandwagon had been built by Hodge and



Buchholz of Janesville for Robbins in 1875. An organ wagon, also from the Burr Robbins show, may have been acquired from Grenier at this time, although there is a possibility the Ringlings bought it a year earlier.

Baraboo's *Sauk County Democrat* reported on November 3, 1889 that Charles Ringling had returned to Baraboo to let contracts for the erection of a new barn and other buildings on the Water Street winter quarters grounds.

On November 7 the same paper reported: "The Ringlings are negotiating for the purchase of land from Mrs. Parker near the railroad yard, where they intend to build a track and store their cars as fast as they arrive. Three of their cars are already here."

During the 1889 season plans were made to place the show on rails the following season. At least one of the Ringlings visited the Adam Forepaugh show in Springfield, Illinois on September 23 where Forepaugh was asked what excess circus property he had for sale.

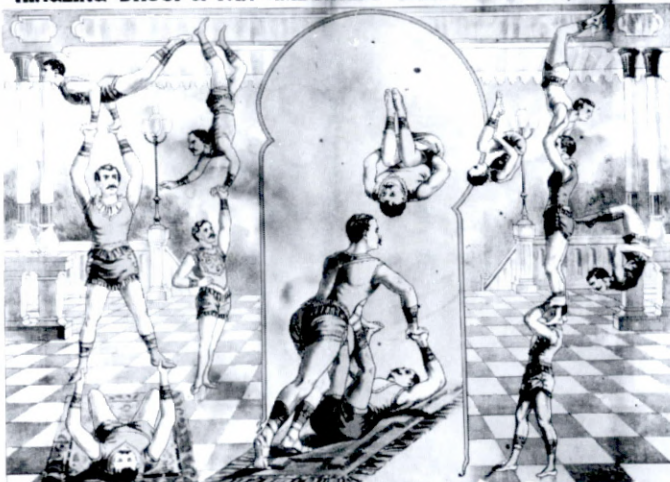
Adam Forepaugh wrote to the Ringlings on October 22 1889: "I have got for sale the following cars and wagons. One passenger coach, three flat cars, 62 feet long; one flat car, 60 feet long; three flat cars, 42 feet long; one ring stock car, 60 feet long; one ring stock car 45 feet long; three stock cars, 42 feet long. All stock cars built by Barney, Smith of Dayton, Ohio.

"All cars are in first class shape and you can pay the way I told you in Springfield, Illinois. Also have one railroad chandelier wagon; one canvas wagon; one plank wagon; one large wagon for canvas; one large cage; one Bengal tiger; two lions; one large kangaroo; one red deer.

"If any of the above property will suit you I will be pleased to sell to you. You might want 2 or 3 nice flats and an advertising car. Using 14 cars would make a fine show. Two cars would hold 18 cages. The other five would hold 17 baggage wagons."

The *Sauk County Democrat* reported on November 7 that the show would move on about seventeen cars and that three cars had already arrived in Baraboo. The November 2, 1889 *Clipper* announced the Ringlings' intention to go on rails. The short note stated: "The Ringling Bros. circus next season will go from wagons to cars—a step forward that is due entirely to the energy of the five brothers who have conducted this tent exhibition with such tact and generosity. Three of the five (W. H. [Otto]; Alf and John Ringling) were in New York last week making extensive

## RINGLING BROS. & VAN AMBUECH'S UNITED MASTER SHOWS



Lithograph used by the Ringling Bros. circus in 1889. Circus Galleries, Ringling Museum of Art.

purchases. They tell us they propose to send out a greatly enlarged show. Their past season which closed October 15, at Baraboo, Wisconsin, was very successful. We predict that they will be heard from next summer."

Adam Forepaugh advertised excess circus equipment in the same issue offering "four flat cars, 60 feet long; one elephant car; one ring stock car, built by Barney Smith & Co.; one passenger coach, latest style, run only three seasons, built by Pennsylvania Railroad; six stock cars; eight cages, will load crossways on cars; one plank wagon; one canvas wagon; one chandelier wagon; six baggage wagons; a lot of reserve seats; one 60 foot round top with five 38 foot middles." Most of this property had been offered to the Ringlings in his October 22 letter.

The *Clipper* ad prompted the Ringlings to move fast to buy from Forepaugh as Otto Ringling quickly went to Philadelphia to buy equipment for a rail show. On November 8 he bought one advance car for \$1,500; one 50 foot stock car, \$400; one 40 foot ring stock car, \$400; one ring stock car, \$350; one 40 foot elephant car, \$400; two 50 foot flat cars, \$400 each; one 46 foot stock car, \$350; one kangaroo, \$100; one cowalopus, \$125 and a camel for \$400. Ringling paid with promissory notes. The \$1,500 for the advance car was deducted and then added back in making a total purchase of \$4,725. Otto Ringling scrawled out the above on a Forepaugh letterhead that day. A note on the back of the letterhead lists three stock cars, one box car, one baggage car, three loaded flats and three empty flats, an indication that further negotiations took place as subsequent documents confirm that the Ringlings acquired eleven railroad cars from Forepaugh.

Payment was made by three promissory notes were signed Ringling Bros. by W. H. R. (William Henry Ringling, known to history as Otto Ringling). The first note for \$800 was due by July 8, 1890. The second note for \$900 and was due on September 8. The third note for \$846 was due on October 8, 1890. Each was paid on time. The remaining amount was probably paid in cash as a down payment.

The \$4,725 is the same number listed in a November 27 letter from Forepaugh to the Ringlings which reads: "I have your stuff ready for some days. I am holding it to save you

\$127 and a little freight.

"I sent you two more baggage wagons which will be \$125 a piece. I also sent you a camel for \$250. He is about twenty months old and very fine. He is loaded with the zebra and the kangaroo in the car and the wagons is all loaded, 6 baggage wagons, 1 cage, 11 cars all in fine shape. A stove in the car and hay, oats, bread, corn [illegible]. They got fuel in it today and all fixed in good shape."

Richard Conover in a 1967 *Bandwagon* article, states that before going to Philadelphia Otto Ringling met with Thomas Grenier in Chicago and purchased more of the former Burr Robbins equipment. He suggests that the balance of the eighteen rail cars used in 1890 came from that source. A hippo and hippo den may have come from Grenier.

The Ringlings advertised surplus property for sale in the November 16, 1889 *Clipper* offering "for sale cheap" a complete and systematized (sic) wagon show, either in parts or wholly, all in first class condition to take the road, with circus, menagerie, side show and dressing room tents, seats, lights, poles, ropes, rigging, properties, etc., cages, dens, baggage wagons, passenger hacks, harness. All of the wardrobe used only one season, and of the finest material. Elephant and camel covers, horse trappings, parade and entree costumes, banners, etc. All property in first class condition, and can be seen at winter quarters, Baraboo, Wisconsin."

Some of the remnants of this equipment may have been sold to the Gollmar brothers, the Ringling's cousins, a year later when they framed their first circus over the winter of 1890-1891.

When the Ringlings wrote to Forepaugh in early January 1890 they were informed by a winter quarters official that Forepaugh was sick and confined to his home. Forepaugh died on January 22, 1890. Otto and John Ringling attended his funeral in Philadelphia on January 27.



# FROM ROAD TO RAIL. THE RINGLING BROS.

## Great United Circus and Menagerie

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READY TO HEAR FROM NOTEWORTHY FEATURES FOR THE COMING SEASON

Address **RINGLING BROS.,**  
BARABOO, WISCONSIN.

The Ringlings placed this advertisement in the November 16, 1889 *New York Clipper*. Pfening Archives.

1890

The 1890 show traveled on eighteen cars, a performer's sleeper, a workmen's sleeper, an elephant car, five horse stock cars, eight flat cars and two advance cars. The parade included two tableau wagons, two band wagons and fifteen cages, including four open dens. The parade did not include a steam calliope.

The one ring performance was given in a 125 round top with one 50 foot middle; a 70 foot menagerie with two 30 foot middles; a 70 foot side show; a 45 foot dressing room top; four horse tops and a dining top.

There were one hundred and seven horses and ponies. The menagerie displayed three elephants, three camels, a bovalapus, six lions, two leopards, a zebra, a zebu, a hippopotamus, twelve monkeys, four kangaroos, six birds, two black wolves, two boa constrictors, a tapir, an antelope, two deer and a tiger that died during the season.

The Ringling show placed an ad in the February 22, 1890 *Clipper* wanting: "A few more high class female circus acts and first class aerial acts, good knockabout clowns, side show and concert people; good sober and reliable bill posters for Nos. 1, 2 and 3 advance cars; boss property man and chandelier man. Bill posters already engaged answer this ad. Please consider silence a polite negative."

On April 3, 1890 the *Sauk County Democrat* reported: "The Ringling Bros. great railroad show will open the season of '90 at Baraboo on May 3, and everything is being put in readiness for this grand gala day. Next Saturday they will bill the town with their new and attractive advertising

matter. This bit of information is given in advance, lest some of the people might wilt at the sight of the startling lithographs. The two advance cars are nearly ready to be sent over the road, and on Saturday will be headed for Dodgeville, which will be their next town to spread canvas. August Ringling, Jr., will be in charge of the bill posters who go with the advance."

On April 17 the *Sauk County Democrat* said: "Saturday, May 3rd, will be a big holiday for Baraboo and surrounding towns and cities. May 3rd is the grand opening day

of what promises to be several times the most noted achievement 'circusatically' speaking of the Ringling Bros managerial career. The bright and attractive pictorials, posters, newspapers, programs, etc. are an indication of what may be expected when the Ringling Bros. New United Railroad Circus, Museum and Menagerie starts out on its triumphant tour of the west. A reporter for the *DEMOCRAT* took a program with him on a visit to the winter quarters of the mammoth concern yesterday and found it an actual handbook or guide for what the management possesses: the monster hippopotamus, the amphibious Bovalapsus, the umbrella-eared elephant, the baby elephant, the leaping horse Spider, the trained stallions, the four footed lightning calculator, the equine terpsichorean, the baby lions and a host of other novelties impossible to enumerate here. The reporter was shown a copy of the contracts with circus artists and performers to say that no other show can produce a roster of arenic talent better than the Ringling Bros. great triple circus. Among the most prominent names are Mlle Julia Lowanda, the great Brizilian (sic) lady rider, Edward Shipp, the four horse equestrian, La Role

Bros., the flying men of the air from Berlin, Germany, the Ashtons, Andrew Gaffney, 'the old Oak,' the Leonard family and a myriad of others, all in all making a convocation that will fairly make many heads swim to think of the immensity of this department. A big show, a big day and a big crowd can safely be predicted for Saturday, May 3."

The season opened in Baraboo on May 3 as Ringling Bros. United Monster Railroad Show with Burr Robbins and other well known showmen on hand. The *Baraboo Republic* published this short review of the show on May 7: "The Ringling Bros. Circus and Menagerie, which exhibited in this city Saturday, was a grand success. It was witnessed by thousands of people, their mammoth tents being crowded both afternoon and evening. The street parade was the finest ever witnessed in Baraboo. The wardrobe is entirely new and of rich material, the designs and workmanship on the same being very beautiful, particularly creditable to Mrs. Al Ringling, under whose supervision the entire work was done. The painting also was fine, as well as the remainder of the appointments, which together with their fine array of horses and other animals form a parade well worth going miles to see.

"The circus performance was better than ever. Many new features were introduced, which greatly pleased the vast audience. It can not be excelled.

"The Ringling Brothers are all gentlemen and are bound to meet with success wherever they go. One thing very creditable to their show is the entire absence of gambling or anything of that nature, nothing of the kind being allowed on the grounds."

At the end of the season the show published its first route book. For the first time a complete roster of circus was listed.

The staff included Otto, Charles, Alf. T.,

Ringling lion cage with a four horse hitch in 1890. The statues on front corners suggest they came from Forepaugh. Circus World Museum collection.





Al and John Ringling, proprietors and managers; Albert E. "Butch" Parsons, superintendent of candy stands; William F. Weldon, musical director; Theodore Miller, cookhouse superintendent; Henry Ringling, manager of concert tickets; Frank Dempsey, superintendent of canvas; William H. Fay, transportation manager; Frank Bartlow, menagerie superintendent; Slim Robinson, manager of sleeping cars; S. Alexander (Delavan), boss hostler; Albert Mann, elephant boss; Charles O. Miller, property superintendent.

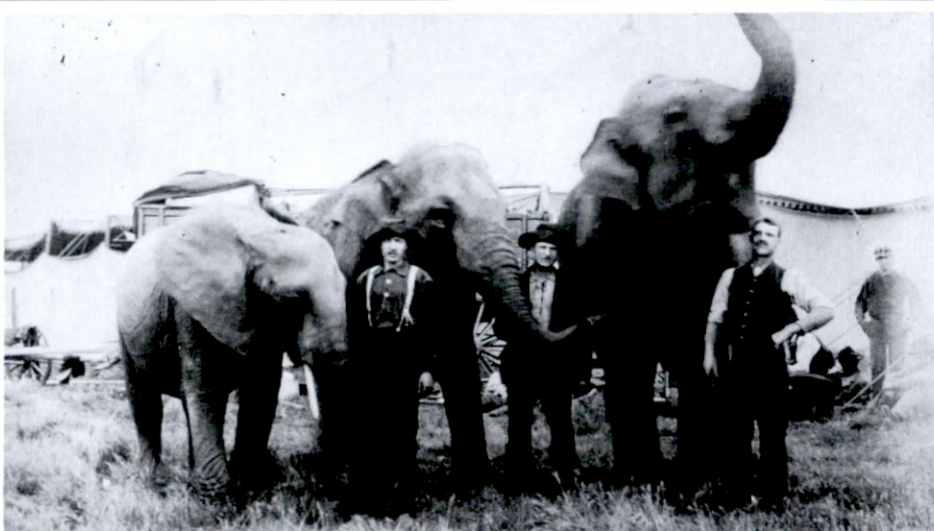
Male performers included: Ed Shipp, William Ashton, Harry Ashton, Ed Billings, Eddie Leonhart, Walla Leonhart, William Monroe, Chris La Role, Harry La Role, Mons. Natalie, William Wheeler, Jules Turnour, Mike Rooney, John Starr, William De Boe, Joseph Anzo and H. D. Barretta.

Female performers included Julia Lowanda, Nellie Leonhart, Flora Leonhart, Fannie Clifford and Miss Harrington.

Other personnel included William H. Weldon, musical director; John Marshall, leader of first band, Frank Preddy, leader of second band; James McMonies, leader of third band; Tom Marshall, leader of orchestra; and Patrick Maher, bag piper. Twenty-one musicians were listed.

Al Ringling made the side show openings and was inside lecturer. James Kilburn was side show boss canvasman. The annex attractions were Ida Williams, fat lady; Sultana Ashia, Arabian Princess; Madam Leland, snake charmer; Prof. W. L. Harrington, magician; Mlle. Lozardo, Circassian; Miss Harrington, educated birds; Inez, mind reader; Major Noble Winnar, midget and Prof. James, ventriloquist.

The advance department included John Ringling, general railroad contractor; B. M. Drake, contracting agent; A. G. Ringling, manager advance advertising car No. 1, with fifteen men; Harry Knapp, manager of advance car No. 2, with six men.



The route book listed this year end program: "Mr. Al. Ringling, Equestrian Director

"1. Operatic selections and grand overture, by the orchestra of 20 pieces, under the leadership of Prof. W. H. Weldon.

"2. Grand entree and tournament.

"3. Leonhart Bros., acrobatic feats.

"4. Wonderful educated ponies, presented by Al Ringling.

"5. Principal bareback somersault act, Master Rooney, clown, Jules Turnour.

"6. Spanish rings, Mons. Natalie; Flying trapeze, Nellie Leonhart.

"7. Dancing rope, Harry LaRole.

"8. Juggling and balancing act, Jules Turnour.

"9. Ashton Bros., triple horizontal bar, clown Ed Leonhart.

"10. Liberty horses presented by William Monroe.

"11. Human serpent, Anzo; boneless wonder, Barretta.

The midway, two pole big top, menagerie and side show tents in Algona, Iowa on July 19, 1890. Circus World Museum collection.

The three Ringling elephants, baby Fanny (African), Jewell and Babylon (Babe) in 1890. Circus World Museum collection.

"12. Principal equestrian act, Julia Lowanda. Clown William Wheeler.

"13. La Role Bros., Christ and Harry, the two flying men of the air.

"14. Mons. Natalie, Grecian equilibrist.

"15. Ashton Bros. amazing acrobatic innovations.

"16. Bounding jockey act by America's pride Edward Shipp.

"17. King of the high stilts, Ed. Billings, clown, William Wheeler.

"18. Tumbling by the company, lead by William Ashton.

"19. Mr. Ed Shipp will ride and drive four thorough bred horses."

The opening day in Baraboo on May 3 was cold and cloudy, but the show drew two big houses. The next stand in Dodgeville brought two good crowds in spite of rain and snow all day. The following day in Lancaster the rain and snow continued.

After getting the show open and running John and Charles Ringling left in Galena, Illinois on May 8 to go on the ad-





vance. The weather bogged the show down in Monroe, Wisconsin on May 9. The baggage wagons were stuck in the mud and the show didn't get away until noon the next day. The delay in making the 98 mile run to Freeport, Illinois the next day forced the cancellation of the parade and the matinee, with the single performance starting at 8:45 pm.

Ed Shipp fell from his horse while doing his hurdle act in Independence, Iowa on May 14. On May 16 in Charles City, Iowa heavy winds forced the peaks of the big top had to be kept down all day.

Ringling ran into opposition from the Great Wallace show in Decorah, Iowa on May 19. In Monticello, Iowa on May 20 three flat cars were derailed and one of the workingmen was hurt by a center pole. In Williamsburg, Iowa on May 23 Ed Shipp returned to his four horse Roman ride and the LaRoles fell from their rigging.

Ringling ran into more opposition from Wallace in Vinton, Iowa on May 26, but the town produced a straw house in the afternoon. A second big top middle and ring were added in Tama, Iowa on June 2 where five hundred Indians attended the matinee.

The show had two good houses in Carroll, Iowa on June 7 with Sells Bros. billed for July 10. When the show arrived in Correctionville, Iowa on June 14 it found the lot flooded and moved to another. West Point, Nebraska produced the biggest gross to that point of the season on June 24. The show received a Bengal tiger in Wahoo, Nebraska on June 25. The next day in David City four horses on a small tableau wagon ran away during the parade.

On July 4 the show played Perry, Iowa where clown Joe Coyle joined. Hot opposition was experienced there from the Wallace show coming in three days later. The small town of 4,000 brought so many people to the lot that the ticket wagon had to be closed for the matinee with patrons given tickets for the night performance. Mons. Natalie joined the show in Newton, Iowa on July 10. A horse and buggy ran away with Ida Williams badly hurt in Belmond, Iowa on July 15.

The show played Algona, Iowa, a town of 3,000 on July 19. The route book noted: "Had pictures of the show taken," some of which are used to illustrate of this article. Mike Rooney turned his first somersault on a horse in Elkader, Iowa on July 22 where the show had to close the ticket wagon after filling two straw houses. Band leader Weldon left the show in Stoughton, Wisconsin for a few days to rest and get treated for sickness. A new fifty foot middle was added to the big top in White Water, Wisconsin on July 28.

Disaster hit in Hartford, Wisconsin on



A group of Ringling performers in 1890. Circus World Museum collection.

July 30 when the big top was blown down and a center pole was broken. No one was hurt. The big top was quickly put up again and the show resumed in forty minutes. The Hartford Press published this report on August 1: "During the early part of the circus performance given by the Ringling Bros., Wednesday, a strong gust of wind coming from the southwest struck the huge tent with terrific force. The first blast loosened a number of the outer stakes to which the guy ropes were attached and soon the whole east end of the tent collapsed. There were about twelve hundred people under the tent at the time and the wildest excitement ensued when the large center pole to the east snapped like a pipe-stem and fell with a crash. All was confusion for a time, and the great mass of human beings were struggling to escape from under the canvas. For a wonder all escaped unhurt though many were badly scared. There seems to have been gross negligence on

Al Ringling with four liberty horses in 1890. Circus World Museum collection.



the part of the ones who had charge of erecting the tent, as the soil where on it stood is quite marshy, loose and composed partly of sawdust taken from the old stave [barrel] factory, and the wind had been blowing quite a gale all day, and was at the time it was put up.

"These facts ought to have called for more caution on the part of those entrusted with its erection. That part, to the windward, should have been double staked and guyed, and the stakes should have been twice the thickness and length of those used. The damage to the troupe must have been considerable. Not only was the canvas, to at least one-third of the tent, badly torn and other parts broken and destroyed, but they sustained a serious loss from the afternoon and evening performance. But the managers are entitled to credit for their manly efforts to please and pacify the excited throng.

"In less than an hour's time one third of the tent was detached and the balance raised, enclosed and seated. They then opened up and gave a free show to all who chose to enter, and we need not say they had a full house then. They also had a good house in the evening."

William Clayton left the show in Nee-

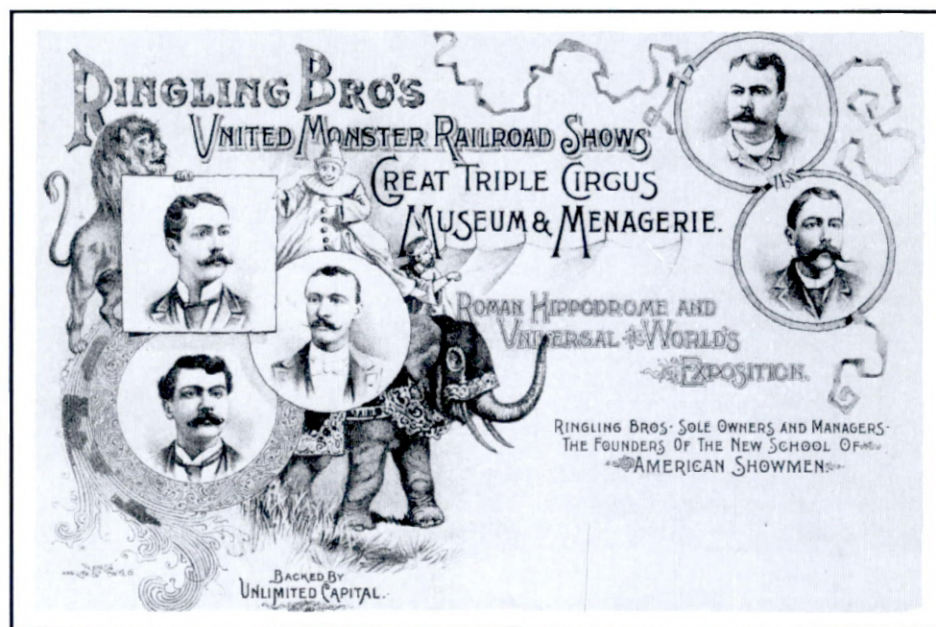




nah, Wisconsin on August 6 and the Coupes and Anzo joined. The Wausau, Wisconsin *Torch of Liberty* published this afterblast following the stand there on August 11: "The Ringling Bros. circus gave two performances in this city last Monday. It is not the largest circus now traveling, but to our taste it is by far the best. The people are gentlemanly, well dressed, and the whole outlay has an appearance of neatness that is creditable in all places and on all occasions. They have the finest lot of horses ever seen with a circus. The animals although not so numerous as in some traveling menageries, are of the very best and from the rarest and most expensive. The great behemoth, weighing 2,500 pounds is the finest animal of the kind on exhibition. The monster elephant is larger than Jumbo, although not so tall. He possesses almost human intelligence. . . . The baby lion, now three months old, attracted much attention, and the tapir, is the best specimen known. The ring performance was good, and had some features not heretofore seen in Wausau. The costumes were new and elegant. Above all, the proprietors are perfect gentlemen. They gave good Satisfaction with their exhibitions in this city."

When the show played Rice Lake, Wisconsin on August 22 the Ringling family were all together including father and mother. In West Superior, Wisconsin it rained all day and the baggage wagons were stuck on the lot. The show did not get off the lot until 8 a. m. the next morn-

The Ringling cookhouse and stove wagon. The dining tent was a three pole square end top. Circus World Museum collection.



ing. The Sunday run of 176 miles delayed the arrive in Augusta until 10:30 p. m. that day for the Monday stand on August 25. When Ringling played Reedsburg,

Ringling Bros. advance advertising car No. 1 c-1891. Circus World Museum collection.



Wisconsin on August 29 a large number of people from nearby Baraboo visited.

There were almost no *Clipper* reports during the season. although the August 23 issue noted: "The Coupes family, concert people, and Anzo, contortionist from the Fisher & Aiken show, recently joined, with McNeal, Irish comedian, who is making a big hit in the concert. Al and John Ringling paid a visit to Baraboo to see the Fisher & Aiken show. We have added new cars and a fifty foot middle piece. The show has two rings and an elevated stage. The hippodrome races are a great attraction. Ida Williams, fat lady, met with an accident July 15, and she, though not entirely recovered, is able to be at work again. Delavan, boss hostler, keeps the horses in fine condition. Prof. Weldon, leader of the band, had to lay off for one week at Oconomowoc on ac-

Letterhead used by the Ringling Bros. in 1890. Pfening Archives.

count of rheumatism. He is at his post again. The side show has added an Arabian princess and a bag piper."

The show entered Ohio for the first time ever on September 2 ever at Hicksville, a town of 3,000. The team pulling the No. 2 bandwagon ran during the parade in Loudenville, Ohio on September 8. Rain in Salem, Ohio on September 10 forced a delay in the parade until 2 p. m. The matinee started at 4 p.m. to a fair house. The show was late arriving in Sharon, Pennsylvania on September 13 because of two feet of water covering the railroad tracks. The parade left the lot at 1:30 p. m. The lot was so soft in Newcomerstown, Ohio on September 16 that the wagons had to be unloaded to get





A group of musicians from the 1890 Ringling big show band. Circus World Museum collection.

on the lot, but there were two good houses. When the show played Titusville, Pennsylvania a number of Ringling people visited the Forepaugh show in nearby Oil City. Addie Forepaugh visited the Ringling show. When Ringling arrived in Corry, Pennsylvania on September 23 they found the McGivens ten cent show stranded there.

In Newcomerstown, Ohio, with population of 1,500, on September 16 the lot was on the other side of a canal and the wagons had to be unloaded to get on the lot. Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania on September 29 was the banner day of the season. The town of 4,000 citizens produced a straw house with the ticket wagon having to be closed a half hour before show

time. The night show strayed them again.

The season's financial success was declared in an ad in the September 27 *Clipper* in which the show boasted: "One continuous boon since the great inaugural day of 1890 and now approaching the close of the grandest and most enormously profitable season of the popular amusement

institution. Ringling Brothers' United Monster Railroad Shows, Triple Circus, Museum and Menagerie, Roman Hippodrome and Universal World's Exposition. Tents twice enlarged during the season to meet the ever increasing demand of the multitudes for seating capacity. Packed from sidewalls to rings throughout Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania." A listing of vitally every act on the show followed.

The gasoline that was to be shipped to Ridgeway, Pennsylvania on September 30 did not arrive to light the show. Natural gas was piped into the big top at great expense and the route book stated it was the first time natural gas had been used to light a circus big top.

Fanny the African elephant was illustrated in an 1890 Ringling courier. Pfening Archives.

Ringling did not arrive from the 120 mile run to Myersdale, Pennsylvania on October 7 until 5 p. m. Because of rain the show blew the date and moved on to Martinsburg, West Virginia, the next stand. One of the bars of the Ashton act broke during their act just as one of them was doing a double somersault, but he was not injured.

The October 18 *Clipper* reported: "The Ringling Bros. are highly pleased with their first tour through Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, and in all probability these promising Western showmen will venture farther east next season."

The show closed in Chicago Junction, Ohio on October 21 and made a 446 mile run back to Baraboo. The *Baraboo Republic* reported on November 12 that another elephant, a camel, and a dromedary had arrived in quarters the day before.

The *Sauk County Democrat* reported on November 13, 1890: "John Ringling attended a sale of a stranded circus at Great Bend, Kansas, last week. He bought an elephant and several camels, which arrived here yesterday. On the afternoon passenger train came a llama and an ibex, but the latter was dead when taken from the train and it is claimed it expired before the train reached Chicago." The fourth elephant, named Zip, gave the show two large elephants and two small ones. Zip had been on the defunct Sells & Andress show.

The Forepaugh show offered excess equipment for sale in the November 22, 1890 *Clipper*: "For sale. One ticket wagon (glass), suitable for parade chariot, very elegant; twelve small two horse cages, Fielding and Sebastian make (will load crosswise); one Ben Hur chariot; two racing camels; one water wagon; two big English chariots, one suitable for band wagon; also stock and flat cars; three fine Asiatic elephants; two complete sets of entry dresses, wardrobe, harness, etc. Enough show property to completely fit out several big shows. Address James E. Cooper, proprietor."

The December 20, 1890 New York *Clipper* reported that John and Otto Ringling had visited the Adam Forepaugh winter quarters in Philadelphia and had acquired several wagons.

On December 24 the *Republic* reported that the Ringling Bros. had purchased four large tableaux and a mammoth bandwagon. The bandwagon was said to have been made in England and was the "largest and finest of its kind ever constructed."

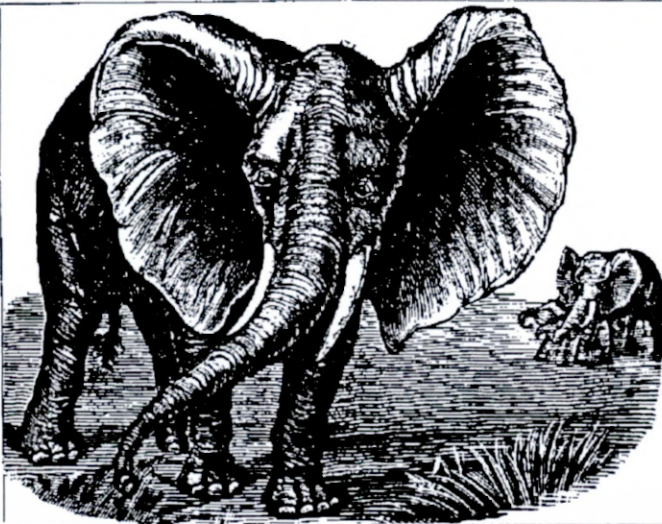
The bandwagon was the Lion and Mirror, now at the Circus World Museum. The four tableaux were the St. George and the Dragon pony float, a three tiered box tableau with four mirrors on each side of

*The Most Wonderful Elephantine Feature Ever Exhibited!*

## THE UMBRELLA-EARED ELEPHANT

THE ONLY ONE IN CAPTIVITY, AND POSSESSING THE LARGEST EARS UNDER THE SUN!

Elephants have ever been an important adjunct to the circus, and it is not unusual for people to judge the comparative sizes of shows by the number of elephants. Always faring ahead of competition, the Ringling Bros. have not been backward in this respect and possess the greatest number and most noteworthy variety of these noble beasts of any management and are constantly adding more. The latest addition is the wonderful Umbrella-Eared Elephant, whose monster ears are the wonder and amazement of all beholders. Their gigantic proportions and striking peculiar form, while creating no end of amusement, on a closer study of its habits and nativity show a wonderful adaptability to its surroundings and convince at sight that such outrageously monstrous ears can possibly exist elsewhere on earth. Were it not entirely out of the question, it would be safe to wager that none can be found to equal their vast dimensions either as a living creature or in history.



His Mighty Ears Serve as Umbrellas in the Rain, Parasols in the Sun, Fans in the Heat, and Bed and Blanket at Night.



the lower deck, a wagon built from the skyboard of the old W. C. Coup organ wagon, and a large tableau with oval mirrors on the sides.

#### 1891

The five brothers from Baraboo had a very successful tour in 1890, which encouraged them to increase the size of their circus for the 1891 season. Their financial success allowed investment in additional equipment.

Ringling traveled on twenty-two cars, with the addition of one sleeper and four flat cars. The cars were painted yellow with red lettering.

The big top went from 125 feet with two 50 foot middles to 160 feet with three 50s. The menagerie went from 70 feet with two 30s to 75 feet with four 30s. The side show top remained 70 foot but a 30 foot middle was added. A 50 foot round with a 30 middle dressing room top was new. The pad room top was a 60 foot round top with one thirty. There were six horse tents and two cookhouse tents.

The number of horses and ponies went from 107 to 133. One elephant was added making four and two camels were added making five.

The route book wagon inventory listed: twenty-four baggage wagons, twenty-one cages, one ticket wagon, and three band-wagons.

The executive staff included William H. Fay, master of transportation; John Snel-len, superintendent of canvas; Spencer Delevan Alexander, superintendent of baggage stock; Rhoda Royal, superintendent of ring stock; Frank Bartlow, superintendent of menagerie; Charles Malloy, superintendent of elephants; Charles Miller, superintendent of properties; R. H. Martin, superintendent of wardrobe; Aft. T. Ringling, press agent on show; William F. Weldon, musical director; Albert Parsons, superintendent of candy stands.

The advance consisted of John Ringling, general agent and railroad contractor; R. M. Drake, contracting agent; W. D. Coxey, press agent; A. G. Ringling, manager of advance car No. 1; Charles Ellis, manager of advance car No. 2; W. G. Howe, excursion agent; Fred Conried, assistant contracting agent. There were eighteen billposters and lithographers on the No. 1 car and fourteen on the No. 3 car.

There were twelve men on the train crew. There were fourteen property men. The canvas crew consisted of seventy-two men. Fourteen men put up the seats. There were nine animal men and fourteen grooms handled the ring stock.

The side show attractions were Charles Andress, magician and bird act; Prof. Andress and wife mind readers; M'lle Ow-



Candy butchers and midway stand in 1890. Butch Parsons is second from right. Circus World Museum collection.

ens, long hair lady; Bertha Carnihan, mid-gut; M'lle Jordan, tattooed lady; Emma Rossi, Circassian princess; George James, fat boy; George Winnar, midget; George Mellivan, tattooed man; Chief DeBro, Espilman; Prof. Dobson, ventriloquist; Mad-am Leland, snake charmer; and a hairless horse. The side show band lead by Clate Alexander had twelve members.

The after show concert acts included musical acts, sketches, an Irish comedian, clog dancers, a sharp shooter and a man doing a Jewish impersonator. The concert orchestra lead by Eddie Day had seven members.

The big show band under William Weldon consisted of twenty-seven musicians.

Twenty-eight canvasmen in back of the menagerie tent in 1890. The canvas wagon behind them was equipped with a monorail for unloading. Circus World Museum collection.



The January 1, 1891 *Sauk County Democrat* reported: "One Monday our eyes were opened wide at the arrival of several railroad cars and wagons for the Ringling Bros. great circus. The most attractive addition was the monstrous band chariot, which is quite English in design and weighs 12,000 pounds." This was property purchased from the Forepaugh show.

Several railroad cars were added to the Ringling Bros. train according to the February 19 *Sauk County Democrat*. It noted that another track had been laid in Mrs. Potter's field to accommodate those and others that would arrive soon.

On March 12 the *Sauk County Democrat* reported: "Ringling Bros. advertising car No. 3 is now at the railroad roundhouse, where it is being newly painted and decorated. Frank Fahland of Buffalo, New York, is doing the work, and the dazzling pictures he paints on the car in an off hand way give evidence of his skill." Like other shows having two advance cars the Ringlings numbered them one and three.

The April 8 *Baraboo Republic* reported



that a female tiger and three cubs had arrived a few days earlier. The same issue contained a Ringling ad wanting to buy twenty-five horses.

On April 23 the *Sauk County Democrat* reported: "Michael Rooney, Ringling Bros. bare back rider, is getting to the front rapidly. At the circus on May 2, he will turn foreword and backward somersaults while riding."

The April 22 *Republic* reported that three lions had been born at winter quarters. The April 29 *Republic* stated that the Ringling Bros. had erected their tents in the eastern part of the city for the opening on May 2. The big top was to seat seven thousand people.

The opening day brought \$928 in the afternoon and \$446 in the evening according to the show's daily ledger. Albert Parson's concession had sales of \$150. Expenses for the day were lot license \$15, billboards \$50.05, cookhouse \$240.45. A. G. Ringling was advanced \$70 for the bill car.

The parade included eight horse teams pulling the Lion & Mirror bandwagon; the Green bandwagon, formerly on Burr Robbins; third bandwagon with a nautical theme and the new hippo den built during the winter by Moeller. Six horse teams pulled the Neptune tableau; the organ wagon, formerly on Burr Robbins; the big tableau, probably a former Forepaugh wagon; and the St. George pony float, the top from the Lion and Mirror telescope. Eighteen cages were pulled by four horse teams.

The performance was presented in two rings and a stage. The route book listed this program: "Concert by the Ringling Bros. Military band of twenty-four pieces under the leadership of W. F. Weldon."

"Display No. 1. Grand Spectacular Tournament Caesar's Triumphal Entry into Rome on the enormous theatrical, hippodrome course. Introducing an entire army of mounted knights, ladies, nobles, gladiators, charioteers, barbarians, cap-



Mike Rooney bareback rider in 1890. The horse was held by Charles Miller, boss property man. Circus World Museum collection.

tives, mailed warriors, helmeted musician elephants, camels, wild beasts, pages, etc. Displaying all the pageantry and pomp of Rome's victorious legions, and introducing the unparalleled scenic and spectacular resources of the Ringling Bros'. World's Greatest Shows.

"Display No. 2. Arena No. 1. Cannon ball juggling, by Andrew Gaffney. Stage high pedestal foot juggling, by Charles Howitt. Arena No. 2. Extraordinary feats of equilibrium, upon the slack wire, by Nettie Corlyn.

"Display No. 3. Arena No. 1. Dancing, somersault, tight rope exhibit, Harry La Role. Stage. Moncayo and Barretta. The human enigmas in their marvelous feats of contortion. Arena No. 2. Exhibition of club swinging, by Lillie Bement.

"Display No. 4. Grand leaping tournament, by the champion athletes of the universe over horses, camels and elephants. Led by Danny O'Brien, the champion double somersault thrower of the world.

"Display No. 5. Arena No. 1. \$10,000

An 1891 Ringling lot scene showing, from right, the side show, menagerie and big top. Circus World Museum collection.

troupe of performing thoroughbreds, presented by Charles. O'Dell. Arena No. 2. The little folks delight school of petite Shetland ponies and leaping horse Spider. Performed by Master Rooney.

"Display No. 6. Arena No. 1. Dashing principal equestrienne bareback Act. Miss Lottie Aymar. Stage. The clowns' carnival. Memhard, Howitt, Natalie, Turnour. Arena No. 2. Principal bareback Somersault act. Mike Rooney.

"Display No. 7. Arena No. 1. Parlor acrobats and head balancers, the marvelous Ashton Brothers. Stage. Double acrobatic performance by the Adair Brothers. Arena No. 2. Amazing acrobatic innovations. Brazil and Alton.

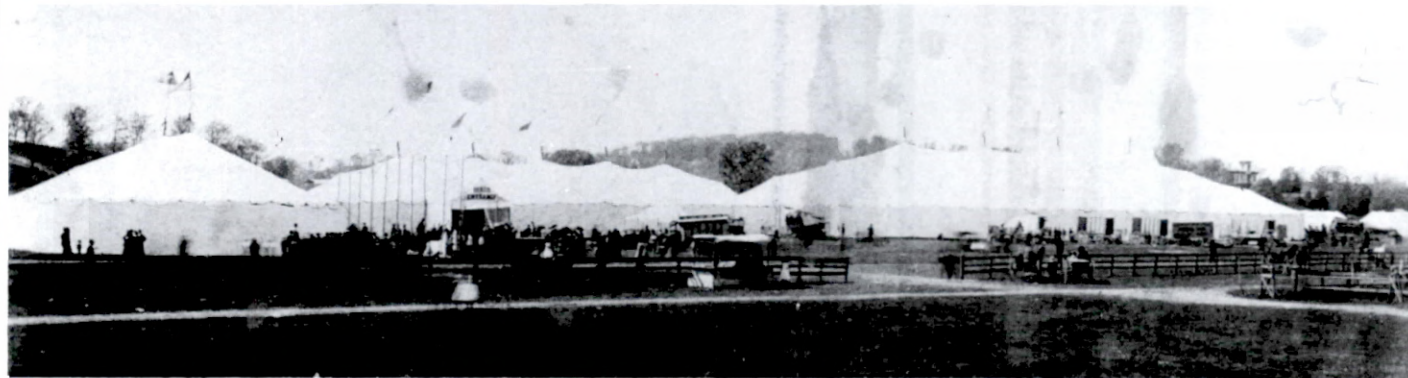
"Display No. 8. Arena No. 1. Finished and beautiful manege act. Miss La Rue. Arena No. 2. Finished and Beautiful manege act. Miss Lottie Watson.

"Display No. 9. Arena No. 1. Feat of jugglery and equilibrium. Jules Turnour. Stage. The children's delight. Prof. Fred Watson and his troupe of highly educated dogs, including the original somersault Jack. Arena No. 2. The most astonishing juggling act extant. O. H. Kurtz.

"Display No. 10. Arena No. 1. High balancing trapeze. Miss Lottie Aymar. Stage. Perilous head balancing trapeze, James Irwin. Daring flying trapeze, Frisco Guiral. Arena No. 2. High balancing trapeze, Miss Irwin. Startling evolution, in the Spanish rings, Barretta and Natalie.

"Display No. 11. Arena No. 1. High aerial balancing perch act, concluding with head balance on the top of the perch. Brazil and Alton. Stage. Daring horizontal bar exercise, Ashton Brothers. Clown Bob Memhard. Arena No. 2. DeVans, in their daring, sensational breakaway ladder perch.

"Display No. 12. Arena No. 1. Startling feats of horsemanship, by Charles. McMahon, hurricane hurdle rider. Arena No. 1. Startling feats of horsemanship, by Charles Watson hurricane hurdle rider.





"Display No. 13. Arena No. 1. Mons. Natalie, the Grecian equilibrist, in dextrous chair pyramid. Arena No. 2. Doc Miller, American equilibrist, who builds a towering pyramid of bottles, tumblers and chairs.

"Display No. 14. La Role Brothers, the flying men of the air, in their dauntless and unequalled return act. Mid-air somersaults, dives, lion's leap and catches.

"Display No. 15. Arena No. 1. Mike Rooney, Ireland's pride, will ride and drive four thoroughbred horses. Arena No. 2. Charles Watson, America's pride will ride and drive four horses.

"Display No. 16. Arena No. 1. Ed Billings, the king of high stilts, in his comical creation, entitled Willie Green. Stage. Danny O'Brien and Mons. Natalie, and their comical burlesque mule. Arena No. 2. Howitt, Memhard and La Vern, in their ludicrous imitations with Mar-digras heads.

"Display No. 17. The great Roman hippodrome races.

"First Event. Brilliant and dashing five-horse tandem hurdle race, over gates and hurdles, driven by Charles O'Dell. Second Event. Gentlemen jockey race. Three times around the track. Riders John Engel, John Foley, Felix Smith and Frank Leonard.

"Third Event. Two horse chariot race. Three times around the track. Drivers, Emma Dorr and Ed. Beattie.

"Fourth Event. Elephant race. Once around the track.

"Fifth Event. Wild and daring Mexican horsemanship, Comanche Charley.

"Sixth Event. Lady flat race. Three times around the track. Riders Emma Dorr, Mexis, Jessie Kennedy and Jessie Cathcart.

"Seventh Event. Pony race, monkey riders. Twice around the track.

"Eighth Event. Roman two horse standing race. Three times around the track. Riders, Charles O'Dell, Charles Browning and Charles. Watson.

"Ninth Event. Ludicrous efforts to obtain first place in the comical wheelbarrow race.

"Tenth Event. Thrilling four-horse Roman chariot race. Three times around the track. Drivers Lottie Watson and Rhoda Royal."

Following the opening the *Baraboo Republic* reported: "The exhibition given in this city last Saturday by the Ringling Brothers was a delightful surprise to all. It was the cleanest show ever exhibited in Baraboo. The parade was one of splendor, far exceeding the expectations of all. The horses, chariots, floats, and the dens of

wild and ferocious beats, looked gorgeous with their new, bright and attractive banners. The entertainment in the rings cannot be excelled. With their magnificent show they cannot fail to have a prosperous season." The article also noted that no arrests had been made in the city that day.

The show made a Sunday run of 35 miles to Madison for May 4. Ringling entered Illinois at Rockford on May 9 then made an 86 mile run to Clinton, Iowa when they found paper for the Forepaugh show. The show went back to Illinois, where ticket sales in Elgin on May 14 were \$600 in the afternoon and \$1025 at night. The company remained in Illinois until going back to Wisconsin for seven



Mrs. Al Ringling. The former Burr Robbins organ wagon is in background. Pfening Archives.

dates including a two day stand in Milwaukee on May 22 and 23. Ticket sales in Milwaukee were \$1126 and \$1445.50 on the 22nd and \$1442.50 and \$711 on the 23rd. The 147 mile run from Fon du Lac on the Chicago and Northwestern cost \$325. Ringling again met opposition from the Forepaugh show in Oshkosh on May 30.

The show played LaCrosse, Wisconsin on June 2. The LaCrosse *Daily Press* published this after notice: "The Ringling Brothers' big show has come and gone. The bright chariots, the beautiful horses, the curious animals, all have gone; but the memory of it still remains and it will be many a long day before those who attended will cease to talk of the many new features of the show. Heretofore the public has known a Barnum, a Sells, a Forepaugh; from this time on Ringling Bros. will take precedence of them all.

"In the stable tents were some of the finest bred and most beautiful horses ever seen in the city. The Ringlings are all practical horsemen and select their stock

with the greatest care. In the dining tent between three and four hundred people are fed daily, and the provisions are of the best, well cooked and neatly served; and the men themselves in all of the different departments are clean, neat, intelligent, well dressed, and gentlemanly in behavior; a most agreeable change from the class of people generally seen with a tent show. The proprietors are very particular in the selection and management of their employes, allowing no fakes, gamblers or toughs to accompany the show, for which they have the sincere thanks of the public.

"The universally expressed opinion of the thousands of people who visited the show yesterday is that it was the best ever exhibited in the city. Can we say more. The public has pronounced its verdict, from this time on Ringling Bros. are the leaders and their next appearance here will be the assurance of another day of enjoyment like that just passed."

By June 3 the show was in Minnesota for a twelve city tour. Two days were played in North Dakota before returning to the Gopher State.

The first Ringling news in the New York *Clipper* appeared in the June 20 issue: "The show since its opening has met with marked success, exhibiting to crowded houses and pleasing all who attend. At Waukegan, Illinois Billy Link (trapeze performer) fell while doing his act, breaking his arm and receiving other slight injuries while turning a double somersault over elephants and camels, Billy Ashton received a serious sprain, which will disable him for a few days. The hippodrome races enthuse all who witness them, while in the dressing room we had occasion to listen to some spirited rivalrous discussions between the lady jockeys. During the tour horse chariot races at Sheboygan, Illinois the tongue of one or the chariots broke, disengaging the excited thoroughbreds, which leaped toward the crowd of frightened spectators. They were checked by property men just in time to avoid a stampede. The weather has been fine, causing Butch Parsons and his assistants to hustle with their lemonade glasses in order to quench the thirst of the masses. Every one laughed when little Willie Green's stilt broke, throwing him the full length of the ring. It took four property men to drag him by his head and shoulders into the dressing room. He escaped uninjured. Lottie Aymar, whose father is dangerously ill at Baraboo, Wisconsin received a telegram stating that he was slowly improving. Last Wednesday Mme. Dare's horse fell



with her in the flat races, throwing her against a quarter pole and bruising her face and shoulders. At Oshkosh Wisconsin, during the street parade 'Old Zip,' one of the elephants, wound its trunk around the neck of a runaway horse, thereby saving many from being hurt. At Rochester, Minnesota one of the horses ridden in Roman standing races ran against a pole breaking its leg. Rattle Snake Tom's collection of snakes numbers about forty. At La Crosse, Wisconsin, Tom gave them a feast on young rabbits."

Grafton, North Dakota, population 2,500, was played on June 20 packing them to the ring curbs in the afternoon, with ticket sales of \$2,060.74. Ticket sale at night was \$293.75. More concert tickets were sold in this little town than anywhere else during the season.

The show played Grand Forks, North Dakota on June 22 with ticket sales of \$1,966.25 at the matinee. The *Daily Plaindealer* commented: "Ringling Bros. are with us to-day with their great circus and menagerie, and our city is crowded with sightseers. Everybody is happy, for the show is as big and as good as was advertised. The *Plaindealer* enjoys a circus, especially this one, and the crowds of citizens that Ringling Bros. bring together in another good thing. It pays in this particular, and so Ringling Bros. are thus public benefactors when contributing to the amusement and education of the people.

"Ringling Bros. are now the leading showmen, and the five brothers who, in a few years have taken the front rank in popular favor, understand their business from the ground up, they know it pays best to be honest with the people and they aim to do more, rather than less than they advertise, and thus everyone who sees their show becomes a free advertiser.

"At 2 o'clock the big tent was crowded. Ten thousand people were comfortably seated, the band struck up a lively air and the grand entree came. Some think this is the best part of the show. What handsome horses, fine riding, beautiful marching and counter-marching. Then business began in earnest. The three rings and elevated stages, the hippodrome track, were occupied and astonishing feats were performed. Eyes and ears had to do their best to take it all in, and from the eager, satisfied countenances on the benches, the thousands seemed to be losing but little.

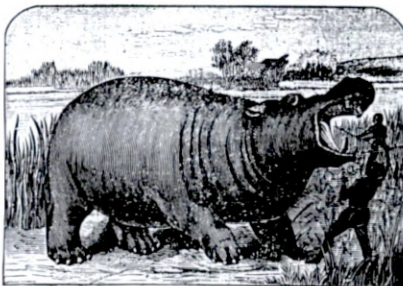
"Now for a little in the line of statistics. It is no small business, this Ringling Bros.' show, and it requires a very considerable amount of ability to manage all the details of the exhibit and the business of an army of 500 men, the care of the animals, etc. Besides those who stop at the hotels the

company's dining tent feeds from 300-400 daily. The company uses 250 horses. How much canvass do you suppose it takes to shelter all the property and hold the visitors? 1,000,000 yards! and about 90 miles of rope is required to keep things solid.

"We have heard ever so many declare 'this is the best show I ever attended' --It is good for a fact. The thousands who attended it this afternoon advise their friends who couldn't be there to take it in this evening.

## RINGLING BROS., WORLD'S GREATEST RAILROAD SHOWS

A Universal Exposition of Earth's Rarest Wonders. The Most Magnificent Amusement Enterprise on Earth.



GRAND 100 ACT CIRCUS given by 300 performers in three rings and elevated stage A MIGHTY MILLIONAIRE MENAGERIE! Containing the greatest variety and greatest number of rare wild animals in the world. A Mammoth Menagerie of Living Lions. LARGEST LIVING HIPPOPOTAMUS in captivity. All under the Largest Canvases ever constructed. Every morning at 10 o'clock.

GRAND FREE STREET PARADE Will pass in pomp and splendor through the principal streets. Positively the Most Elaborate and Most Spectacular display ever inaugurated. Two Grand and Complete Exhibitions daily--afternoon and night. Doors open at 1 and 7 o'clock p. m. Performances one hour later. Admission, 50c. Children under 12 years old half price. See Exhibit in all its crowded magnificence at DULUTH, MONDAY, JUNE 29.

Ringling newspaper ad used in Duluth, Minnesota in 1891. Pfening Archives.

"Success to the Ringlings, the five American boys who are carrying on the business Barnum laid down after he had administered to the pleasure of 100,000,000 people. May they win honor, fame and fortune and continue long in the business of interesting the public."

Detroit City, Minnesota was the June 23 date. Although it rained all day, the matinee ticket sales produced \$751.25. The night show was cancelled.

Duluth, Minnesota was played on June 29. An extensive article on the history of the show appeared in the Duluth *Daily News* that had all the earmarks of a press agent's handout: "Great oaks from little acorns grow. This wise old saying has been exemplified many times in the conduct of men who, starting with almost nothing, have won fame and fortune in the arena of life. In no case can it be more fittingly applied than in that of the celebrated Ringling Brothers, who have rapidly advanced from a comparatively small beginning to the important position of America's chief amusement caterers. 'It

is not without reason,' says Rollin, 'that history has always been considered as the light of ages, the faithful evidence of truth, the source of prudence and good counsel, and the rule and the conduct of good manners.'

"The great managerial quintette, popularly known as the Ringling Brothers, is composed of the five brothers, Albert, Otto, Alfred, Charles and John, ranging in ages from 24 to 37 years. The last ten years of their somewhat phenomenal existence as public caterers have been devoted to the perfection of their great tent-ed exposition, known for the season of 1891 as Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Railroad Shows. They have been properly styled the new school of American showmen, on account of the entirely new plan of circus management adopted and carried out by them since entering this popular profession. The embryo of the now enormous arenic and zoological enterprise was a little torn and tattered tent pitched in the back yard of the parental roof to which the enormous price of admission of one cent was charged. The performance consisted of diverse hand springs, flip flaps and trapeze performances in which the proprietors themselves together with the salaried artists, consisting of the most athletic boys in the circle of their acquaintances, took a part, and many a comrade of the Ringling Brothers' school boy days now grown to manhood or womanhood, remembers with pleasure the Saturday afternoon entertainments of the Ringling Brothers' first circus, and many a reminiscent old citizen of their native city relates the story of the five boys' penny show, now grown to national importance.

"Their first venture was a specialty company entitled Ringling Brothers' Carnival of fun. The five brothers furnished the band, orchestra, performance and management, and their venture was a success from the very beginning. For several years this enterprise was continued, the plucky and energetic managers gradually enlarging and perfecting their show and playing in opera houses and halls throughout the United States.

"Success having attended this venture, they began to look for a less limited field, and naturally found themselves drawn toward their first choice, the tented amusement world. Having decided to make the venture, plans and preparations were begun during the winter of 1878 to put out as large a circus as their limited means would permit. Accordingly tents, wagons, paraphernalia, etc., were ordered and, while the specialty company was still on the road, the coming circus was eagerly planned and schemed. It soon became apparent to the aspiring managers, however, that a circus was not the cheap-



est thing in the world to buy and having invested the greater part of their capital in the necessary equipment of the show the question of horses became a paramount problem. The only solution of this difficulty was to buy a few very cheap horses and hire the balance. The adaptability of the Ringling Brothers to the various branches of their business was very remarkable at this time and their great versatility (sic) is humorously recalled by the notice a disgruntled scribe whose grasping avarice for 'comps' had not been fully satisfied, inserted in the morning issue of his paper. It read: 'The Ringling Bros. circus which exhibited in St. Cloud yesterday is evidently a money-making institution. The proprietors themselves play in the band, act in the ring, juggle, play ring master, sell tickets, manage the show and carry water to the elephant.' The last statement, however, could not be substantiated by the facts, for the show at this time did not even boast of one elephant.

"The next year the show was doubled in size, and the following season a co-partnership was formed with the celebrated Yankee Robinson, with whose show the Ringling Brothers' combined and traveled under the name of Old Yankee Robinson and Ringling Brothers' Combined Shows. Towards the close of the season the veteran showman died, the Ringling Brothers retaining the entire show. Mr. Robinson had strong faith in the future greatness of his business associates, and was often heard to remark: 'The Ringling Brothers' are the coming men.' How well Mr. Robinson prophesied is shown by the fact that the Ringling Brothers are today considered the leading showmen of this continent and recognized, both at home and abroad, as the leaders of the white tent managers.

"From this time on the show gradually but rapidly gathered strength, size, prestige and popularity, playing everywhere to big business, and becoming favorably known throughout the United States for its conservative management and excellent exhibitions. Having won an enviable reputation for fair dealing, the Messrs. Ringling were determined to maintain it, but as the show grew to enormous proportions they were confronted with a difficulty which it seemed impossible to avoid. The question was, how to combat the horde of dishonest follow-

ers and confidence men who, finding an advantage in the great crowds of patrons daily attending the show, began to flock and swarm in the towns and cities visited by the Ringling Brothers and attempted to work their nefarious games on the unwary visitors. Stringent measures were at once adopted. A competent force of detectives was engaged through whose acquaintance with the records of criminals many an aspiring genius of the light-fingered gentry suddenly found himself confronted with the charges of transgressions for which his portrait adorned the rogues' gallery. Other effective means were adopted by which the Ringling Brothers ridded themselves of this pest. The mayors of each city were warned to

ruin. But the trick was discovered and the perpetrators found themselves confronted with the only alternative to avoid arrest for libel and conspiracy and consequently fled, acknowledging that there was at least one honest show in America, whose proprietors could neither be bribed, threatened nor forced into apathy in the face of their depredations, and a fakir or gambler would no sooner think of coming near the great Ringling show at this time than a fish would of visiting dry land.

'The season of 1884 closed with the last and the largest 'big wagon show' that was ever run, requiring 250 horses to transport it from place to place.

'Though the season just past had been a great financial success, it brought the

brothers to a realization of the fact that their show had far outgrown the limits of a wagon show, and during the winter following all preparations and necessary changes were made to convert into a railroad show, the third largest in the United States, with property valued at a million dollars. At this point it is not strange that these boys stopped

to look back over their career of a few brief years and can we blame them for a feeling of pride as they realized that in so short a space of time their business had grown from seven wagons and sixteen horses to such magnificent proportions and this season the characteristics of their natures was demonstrated more fully than at any previous time; instead of confining their business to the west where they would have had but little competition, they determined to beard the lion in his den; to fight the enemy in his stronghold, and so Ringling Brothers' first railroad show was routed through the east, taking in Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, the two Virginias and Ohio. It was a daring move, but its apparent recklessness contained the essence of success. The live, hustling Wisconsin boys captured the east by storm and the season was crowned with phenomenal success, the boys returning home triumphant, having made \$100,000 and gained a reputation in the amusement world second to none.

"During the season of 1885 the Ringling Brothers again formed a copartner ship with one of America's big shows namely, the great Van Amburgh circus and menagerie, and traveled under the name of Ringling Brothers and Van Amburgh's



Ringling 1891 lot scene showing three of the wagons purchased from Forepaugh. Joe Bradbury collection.

issue no licenses on exhibition day and if perchance a few attempted to operate without one, and all else failed, warrants were sworn out for the arrest of the guilty parties and charges preferred before a magistrate and thus speedy justice was done. It was war for a long time between the Ringling Brothers and the confidence men, but the latter were at length forced to retire. During this controversy between the show and the 'fakirs' a cunning scheme was concocted by the latter by which it was hoped the Ringling Brothers might be induced to relinquish their firm opposition. Realizing that as long as the management was making money their firm stand would be maintained, a dozen of these desperate characters organized and secretly flooded the territory in which the show was playing with anonymous dodgers, letters and circulars, of a vile and obscene character, denouncing the show and warning the public to beware of it.

'The plan was to thus cripple the show, cut off its revenue, and force the insolvent management to accede to their demands in order to save themselves from total



United Monster shows. This fusion resulted similarly to the Yankee Robinson combination, the Ringling Brothers again retaining complete possession of the combined shows.

"During the season of '86, '87, '88, '89 the Ringling Brothers flourished and acquired immense wealth, and the name of their institution became a household word throughout the East and West, and the ever welcome day on which the great show was billed to appear became known all over the country as 'Ringling Day.' The show had now attained proportions that placed it on an equal footing with its older rivals and it lacked only the prestige time alone can bring to place the great amusement enterprise in a proper light before the public.

"Last year the show was considered an equal rival for supremacy with the two other leading shows, but the season of 1891 marked such enormous additions and startling innovations in the way of new features and costly paraphernalia and the thousand and one things that constitute the Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows that both with the press and public there is no longer any doubt as to which of the big shows lead. The last have become the first and Ringling Brothers stand today upon a higher place than any circus management that has ever catered to the American public. They have filled the niche that was left open in the amusement world by the death of Forepaugh and henceforth the Ringling Brothers must be acknowledged as America's greatest circus managers. There is no better illustration of what push and ability can do than the above story of the Ringling Brothers who have risen step by step from the lowest round to the very top of the ladder of fame."

The show cut across Wisconsin and entered Michigan at Gladstone on July 6. This after notice appeared in the Battle Creek, Michigan *Daily Moon* on July 21: "The immense canvas of the Ringling Bros. was filled to a close approach of being uncomfortable yesterday afternoon, and in the evening the town people filed in until all of the available seating room was filled. The best thing we can possibly say for the entertainment is that everybody appeared pleased and satisfied at the managers' attempt to give them a ringing good show.

The La Role Bros. in their grand aerial acts, introducing the great feature in which one of these daring trapezists does a double act in mid air while jumping through space, from his suspended bar to the arms of his brother, who is also suspended in mid air by his feet, is marvelous. The three menage act of Madame Lottie Watson, Lillie Rue, and Charles

[illegible]

Herald used by Ringling Bros. in 1891.  
Pfening Archives.

O'Dell was also a most surprising feature of this show that is crowded with pleasing surprises for the patron from the parade through to the last act.

The great head balancing act of James Irwin on the trapeze was a wonderful feature. Mr. Irwin has a great head, but not in the general acceptance of the phrase, more literally so. Miss Lottie Aymar, the principal lady rider, was as graceful as she was pretty, and accomplished all her business in a most acceptable manner. The Signor Campani in his Mexican riding act and in the act introducing four

horses and the hurdle was a beautiful piece of professional business.

"In fact, everything was in a most perfect working order, and the show had no hindrances or jogs in its entire presentation. The menagerie was also a great feature with those interested in zoological studies. The baby lions, baby kangaroo, blood exuding behemoth of Holy writ, of whom it is written in the book of Job,--'His bones are as tubes of brass. He moved his tail like a cedar, He drinketh up a river and hasteth not,' etc. etc.

"All of these features are added to the great show and deserve mention to illustrate the fact that Ringling Bros. have filled the niche in the amusement world left open by the death of Forepaugh and Barnum. There is no better study for a young man than the lives of these successful managers. They illustrate what push, untiring energy and an honest representation to a generous public may accomplish, and the Ringlings are the truthful exponents of all these commendable qualifications. They will have another crowded canvas when they visit this city, as they have made an enviable reputation for themselves here."

The Galesburg, Illinois *Daily Mail* published this piece concerning the August 1 stand there: 'Twenty-five years ago, had any one predicted that one day an enormous amusement enterprise, of such vast dimensions as the Ringling Bros.' colossal railroad shows, would wend its ponderous way to almost 200 principal cities of the Union each year, the statement would be listened to as veriest nonsense. Yet all this has come to pass.

"Glittering chariots, trained horses and skilled performers, zoological exhibits, hippodrome performances and a veritable city of snow white tents and paraphernalia for its systematic daily erection, the whole requiring mammoth trains of specially constructed cars to transport it from place to place, have taken the place of the half a dozen red wagons and blatant brass band that constituted the circus of former years.

"A representative of this paper was on hand bright and early at the depot, to see the show come in. As soon as the cars had been switched near the street most convenient for unloading, a vast army of men, who had been sleeping in their berths on the train devoted to the transportation of the employees, put in an appearance.

"We follow the last wagon to the show grounds, and arrive there just in time to see the tent superintendent commence his work. He rules supreme in this department. The ground is quickly but accurately measured, laid out and staked off. The tent superintendent marks the



spot for every stake with a small wire pennant.

"The tent is in sections and is unrolled by the canvas men in such a way that it is spread out on the ground exactly beneath the place where it is to be erected, with the throat close to the base of the center poles. The sections are all laced together to form the roof of the enormous cloth covered auditoriums. The smaller tents are laid out in the same way. The size of it all is something enormous. There are 250 horses; 500 people; over a million yards of canvas, covering more than a block of ground, which took 545 millions of stitches to put it together, representing the work of an army for many months; there is over a mile of stakes, and ropes enough to reach from Galesburg, to the World's Fair city. Besides the two big tents there are the two large dressing rooms, the dining and the stable tents, and the museum tents, the whole covering ten acres of ground.

"Meanwhile preparations have been in progress for the street parade, which is of course, a prominent feature of every well regulated circus. A long line of closed cages awakened curiosity and anticipation as to what might be their contents, and one, with always yawning likeness of a blood-sweating hippopotamus on the outside, was the cynosure of all eyes. The huge elephants stalked solemnly along with a footstep which would have flattened out a man like a caterpillar. The camels come next, wearing an expression of great resignation on their peculiar faces. Especially noticeable were the beautiful horses, strong, firmly built creatures.

"The procession moved around the square and returned again up Main street. A man upon the last wagon announced that there would be a free exhibition at the show grounds after the parade, and the vast crowd followed the procession to the grounds.

"When the reporter returned to the office he found Mr. Alfred Ringling, one of the proprietors of the great show he had witnessed, and a genial and pleasant fellow withal. When he found that we were greatly interested in his mammoth traveling city, he extended to us a cordial invitation to visit to show grounds in company with him and see some of the inside workings, the home life of the show people. The musicians, artists and freaks, live at the hotels, but the vast army of laborers eat upon the grounds. To provide for the inner circus man, the show carries its own force of cooks. The fare may not be equal to Domonica, but it is good and wholesome, well served.

"In the two large dining tents between three and four hundred people are fed daily, and the provisions are of the best, well cooked and neatly served. The proprietors are very particular in the selection and management of their employees, allowing no fakes, gamblers or frauds to accompany the show.

"The kitchens are on wheels, equipped with big ranges, and with drop shelves on each side to hold the dishes, everything being planned to give the greatest capacity in the smallest space. The waiters are clad in white caps and jackets, and add greatly to the effect of what is really a very festive scene.

"Perhaps one of the most interesting sights among the vast army of dens and

comes the climax of the races and of the whole program. These are the magnificent chariot races upon the hippodrome carrying the spectator back to the days of Roman splendor. It is a scene from Ben Hur.

"Great oaks from little acorns grow." This wise old saying has been exemplified many times in the conduct of men who, starting with almost nothing, have won fame and fortune in arena of life. In no case can it be more fitting applied than in that of the celebrated Ringling Brothers, who have rapidly advanced from a comparatively small beginning to the important position of America's chief amusement caterers.

"Last year the show was considered an



This photo of the Lion and Mirror bandwagon appeared in the 1894 Ringling route book. It was first on the show in 1891. Pfening Archives.

cages was a large Asiatic lioness nursing her three little babies who scampered about their iron bound play-room like little kittens.

"The motherly solicitude with which the kangaroo housed her young in that peculiar pouch nature supplied them with was the comment of the many bystanders.

"Promptly at 2 o'clock the equestrian director's bell announced the opening of the show, and in a few moments' time the immense hippodrome track, three rings and stage, were filled with the great tournament scene in which were introduced soldiers, civilians, princes, equestrians, beasts, camels, elephants, etc., dressed in the style of barbaric splendor that characterized Rome at the time of Caesar's ascendancy. It was indeed a grand panorama of moving old and glitter.

"After this sublime sight the circus began in dead earnest, and the startling acts crowded each other in rapid succession in the big three ring show.

"Not the least exciting part of the performance is the grand hippodrome races around the broad course outside the rings. This was the finale and consummation of the elaborately prepared program, which had been going forward in triplicate order for two hours. Finally there

equal rival for supremacy with the two other leading shows but the season of 1891 marked such enormous additions and startling innovations in the Ringling Bros.' World's Greatest Shows that both with the press and the public there is no longer any doubt as to which of the big shows lead. The last have become the first, and Ringling Bros. stand today upon a higher plane than any circus management that has ever catered to the American public."

The Baraboo brothers were riding high with a very successful season and celebrated with a full page puff advertisement in the August 1 New York *Clipper* headed: "Triumphantly it rides upon the high seas of success. This its twelfth season, one continuous boom and glorious regal crowning trumpet of its many past great victories." Large drawings of each of the brothers illustrated the ad. Twenty-five performers were then listed. At the bottom of the page these quotes, among others, were listed from newspapers. "When the enormous strides the Ringling Bros. have made in late years in bringing before the public a show of truly wonderful merit and proportions are considered, conjecture fails to place a limit on their present, as well as future possibilities." *Chicago Times*, April 18.

"A really extensive and first class show, with a parade that is simply gorgeous, a menagerie of inconceivable extent and performances that are really ex-



cellent, deserving of very liberal patronage.' *Milwaukee Journal*, May 22.

"The season of 1891 has marked such enormous additions and startling innovations in the way of new features and costly paraphernalia, and the thousand and one thing that constitute the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows, that both with the press and public there is no longer any doubt as to which of the big shows lead. The last have become the first, and Ringling Bros. stand today upon a higher plane than any circus management that has ever catered to the American public, and henceforth Ringling Bros. must be acknowledged America's greatest circus managers.' *Duluth Daily News*, June 29.

"It's a great show. Ringling Bros. are favorites here, for their tents have been crowded to suffocation today. Never was there such a crush, and the ticket sellers could not begin to sell the tickets fast enough. Ten thousand people saw the show in the afternoon.' *West Superior, Wisconsin Evening Telegram*, June 30.

"Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows stands on its merits as being in many respects a new departure, and a happy one at that. This was attested to by an audience that filled the big three ring tent last evening. It was a constant round of applause from the start to the final act. The parade was over a mile long.' *Milwaukee Daily News*, May 23.

"Everything advertised was shown and more too.' *Clinton, Iowa Daily News*, May 12.

"The parade was a marvel of beauty, the three ring show excellent, the horses fine, the wardrobe elegant, the hippodrome great.' *Fond du Lac, Wisconsin Daily Commonwealth*, May 21.

"The Ringlings give exceptionally good performances. Ringling Bros are great showman and have grown rapidly and substantially. They gave the best exhibitions ever seen in this city. The Ringlings are the show people of this country.' *Rockford, Illinois Evening Republican*, May 11."

Benton Harbor on August 1 produced a straw matinee and a big night house. The show billed Chicago for this date and the route book stated that a thousand people from the Windy City came to see the show.

The Streator, *Illinois Daily Independent* published this report the day after the show played there on August 3: "Ringling Brothers' colossal shows with their bright chariots, daring drivers, beautiful horses, skillful jockeys, curious animals and a grand ag-

gregation of able actors and nimble acrobats and contortionists are here, and the only circus that Streator is to have this year proves to be one of the best, if not the best that has ever been here, Barnum and Forepaugh not excepted.

"They came in on their special trains yesterday morning, and were at once transferred to the Santa Fe and taken to the show grounds on Main street, just east of the Santa Fe depot.

"At that time the parade made its appearance and was heralded with joy by the small boy, while his more conservative parents showed their admiration.

"Brass bands, handsome wagons, full of fierce and curious animals, hundreds of well kept horses and ponies, armor clad warriors, a herd of ponderous elephants, camels, sacred cattle and many other attractions combined to make a gorgeous display and win from the public a most favorable verdict.

"Immediately after the parade a grand free performance was given on the grounds and like every other part of the circus, was well received by the large audience that assembled to witness it. To get an idea of the magnitude and perfect system of the great shows one has only to stroll about the grounds and through the tents under the guidance of the courteous managers. An hour may profitably be spent in this city of canvas which is governed in a model manner. All the employees, numbering nearly 500, are neat, intelligent and gentlemanly, no bums, gamblers, fakes or other toughs being allowed to accompany the show. The proprietors are very particular in this respect, for which they deserve the thanks of the circus attending public, to whom this is a decided new feature. Ringling Bros. were

The Ringling show first used lithographs from the Courier Company in 1891. This is an example. Pfening Archives.

some time ridding themselves of the fakirs who accompany nearly every circus, but perseverance, money and a competent force of detectives accomplished the desired result. During their fight against the fakers an effort was made to down them, but they were victorious and the fakirs were forced to seek other fields.

"The dining tents in which nearly four hundred men are fed are neat and clean and the provisions are of the best quality and well cooked; the stables are filled with handsome, well kept horses that are selected with the greatest care; the menagerie is replete with animals of every kind; and the mammoth show tent with its five center poles and numerous rows of seats is most perfectly planned.

"There are 250 horses; 500 people; over a million yards of canvas, covering more than a block of ground, which took 545 million of stitches to put together, representing the work of an army for many months, there is over a mile of stakes, and many miles of ropes.

"The expenses of such an aggregation are simply enormous, being not less than \$2,500 every day, and all this has been acquired by Ringling Bros. in a few brief years. It represents brains, energy and ceaseless toil on their part, and a hearty appreciation on the part of the public.

"When the doors opened at one o'clock this afternoon a large crowd was waiting to be admitted and in an hour the vast tent holding 10,000 people was almost uncomfortably filled, although seats were provided for all.

"The performance throughout was excellent, the three rings being always full of first-class artists who kept the audience busy catching all their difficult feats. The only complaint that anyone could make is that they were not able to watch all the able actors at once, although all were well worthy of special attention.

"There is no better example of what push and energy can do than the story of how the Ringling Bros. arose from obscurity to the top of the ladder. The embryo of their present gigantic shows was nothing but an abundance of confidence, indomitable will power and stick-to-it-ness. While they are still young men, ranging from 25 to 37 years of age, yet to them the public owes its gratitude for the many beneficent reforms they have introduced into the circus business. They are popularly known as 'The new school of American Showmen,' and credit is due them for having eliminated from the circus many of its worse features.





"During their entire career these wide awake managers have shown an inclination to give the public the biggest and best show possible to be had. The places formerly occupied by Barnum and Forepaugh have fallen to them, and they are proving their ability to fill their positions in a manner that would win words of praise from the great showmen who are not at rest."

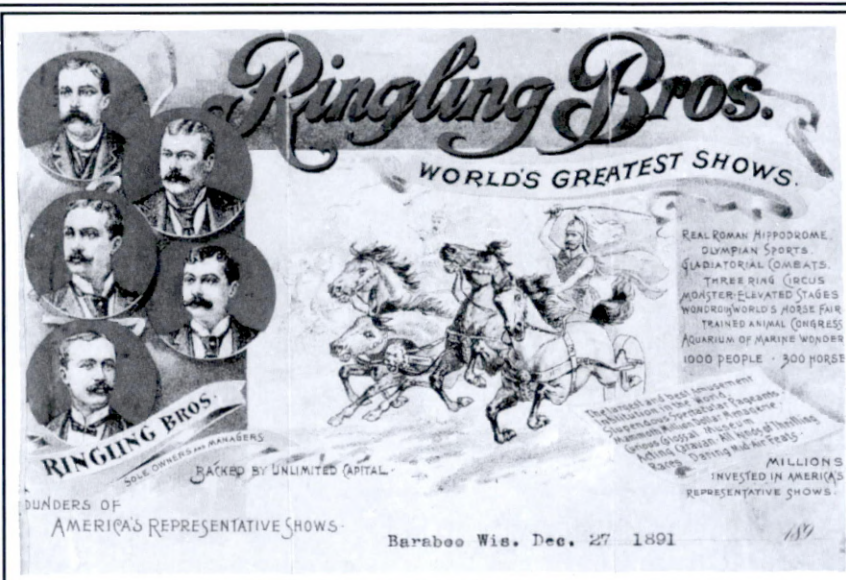
The World's Greatest played Monticello, Illinois on August 20 after a 120 mile run from Pontiac, not arriving until 10:30. The late matinee was poorly attended and the night show didn't amount to much either as it was the final day of a fair. A number of new animals arrived from St. Louis in Shelbyville, Illinois on August 24. A camel died there.

After the Ringling show played Independence, Missouri on September 15 the Kansas City *Daily Times* reported in what may have been a show generated press release: "Among the lady riders Miss Lottie Aymar's principal act won rounds of applause, while the riding of Miss Lillie La Rue, Miss Emma Dorr and Mme. Lottie Watson showed the superiority of Ringling Bros. coterie of equestriennes.

"Sig Carlado in his Mexican riding exploits showed lovers of this style of work a great many new features in equestrianism. The five horse tandem act of Mr. Charles O'Dell was indeed a master piece of horsemanship, as his team of five English flyers sped around the hippodrome track each horse directly ahead of the other and all managed by the ribbons held in the hands of the expert horseman.

"The somersault act of the famous Irish lad Mike Rooney again demonstrated the fact that 'there never was a coward where the shamrock grows,' while the riding of Charles McMahon, Mr. Watson and Messrs. Wilking, and Fisher's four-horse acts were all ridden with a grace and style that spoke a world of praise for this part of Ringling Bros. circus.

"Probably the most daring act ever performed by any trapeze team was that of the La Role brothers, whose



Ringling Bros. letterhead used in 1891. Pfening Archives.

double somersault in the dome of the pavilion, while leaping a distance of fifty feet and catching in each other's arms, astounding the vast audience.

"Mr. James Irwin astonished the big audience by balancing on his head on a single trapeze, at the same time complacently eating and drinking while swinging in this inverted position.

"The trained animals were a marvel of brute culture, and clearly demonstrated the power of man's master mind over brute intelligence. The dancing stallion showed terpsichorean art from an equine standpoint, while the other performing animals all reflected credit on this feature of the show. The leaping horse 'Spider'

This spec poster was printed by Courier for the 1891 Ringling show. Pfening Archives.



was another feature worthy of note among the animals, he actually performed the feat of leaping over the backs of two other horses.

"Not the least exciting part of the performance is the grand hippodrome races around the broad course outside the rings. Fleet racers, backed by lightly built jockeys, give all the appearance of a derby meet. A string of small ponies, mounted by monkey, race madly about the course, amid the cheers of the multitude, while the inspiring strain from the band add to the gaiety

of the occasion. During one of the races there was a thrilling incident. It was the double horseback race, when two fearless riders, each standing upon two horses, sweep proudly about the course, the horses throwing themselves into the spirit of the race. They are neck and neck, when one of a magnificent pair of dapple grays, stumbles and falls, hurling the rider, the one in yellow, sharply over their heads. He strikes the ground with a suppressed sound. It is soon found that the brave rider is not badly hurt. The horses are taken back to the scratch; a new start is made, and the man in the yellow colors wins amid the deafening applause of the multitude. There are also hurdle races, and exhibition of cowboy horsemanship, where the rider picks up articles from the ground as he gallops by. And as the vast throngs poured out of the tents each one was ready to vow that the Ringling Bros. have the biggest and best show before the public.

The show started a long string of Missouri dates at Louisiana on September 7 that lasted until September 26 at Bolivar. A "Hey Rube" occurred in Bolivar. The 1914 composite route book noted: "A very fierce battle was fought between the show and the people of the town and vicinity. Many of the local bad men were badly injured. The show got out after a very exciting experience without suffering and injury."

The September 19 *Clipper* contained these notes from the Ringling show: "The De Vans have joined.



They do a novel breakaway ladder perch act in elegant French court costumes. Our triplet baby lions have proved a great attraction. We have five rows of trunks in our dressing room. The chief grand trunk lines are called Broadway and the Bowery, and the others are Wall Street, noted for wealth; Chestnut Street, noted for jokes, and Baxter Street, named for the numerous clothes that hang on its wardrobe line. Darilus Green and his flying machine lately flew over our tent. The professor hailed from some county fair, and had an oblong balloon shaped like a silk worm's cocoon, with a whirling windmill attachment. He landed safely. At Fulton, Missouri after crowding the people in we had to stop selling tickets, though a vast crowd still clamored for admission. At Mexico, Missouri, the former home of James Robinson, we had a pleasant visit from that world famed equestrian, who still has a lively interest in the knights of the tanbark and spangle. He drove a unique turn out, a pony cart of great neatness and beauty. William O'Dell is now driving a beautiful five horse tandem over hurdles and obstacles, a picturesque riding act that proves a decided feature. We have an unusual number of first class head balancers, a full half dozen, led by the great James Irwin, whose act is a continual sensation. That genial performer, Ed Billings, concluding that honey was never made with one bee in a hive, has entered the state or matrimony. The bride was Nellie Coleman, a highly accomplished non professional of Louisville, Kentucky, where the wedding occurred August 29. Ed gave the boys a reception, and, being very popular and a man of generous qualities, has their kindest wishes."

The October 3 *Clipper* published these Ringling notes: "We have entered that section where afternoon is called evening, a sure sign of progress South. Another week will make us Arkansas travelers, and the band is playing such plantation airs as *O, Miss Lou, Way Down South In Dixie* and *Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground*. Neal and Shelby joined recently, but have separated, Shelby working alone. Dan O'Brien is leaping in splendid style, and has sounded the cry: 'Bring in another elephant.' Increasing the length of his principal leap that much. At Lamar, Missouri, Lottie Aymar was thrown from her horse against a stake, dislocating and badly

bruising her leg, which has since been encased in plaster, but will come around with good care. Harry Ashton's attack of fever proved a bad one, and he had to abandon sawdust and go home to Cincinnati, where he improves slowly. Bill Ashton is remaining, and is doing good single work; but a ruptured heel cord bars him from leaps at present. Bob Memhard has regained his health, and is clowning, leaping and circling the bars with more vim and vigor than ever. Mons. Natalie is mourning the loss of one of his learned pigs, which, after receiving a classical education, wilted away from brain exhaus-



The St. George and the Dragon float that had come from the Adam Forepaugh show. Pfening Archives.

tion and Southern heat. We are doing a very heavy business all along the line. Good weather still smiles, and the saying seems true that it never rains on the Ringlings. We have a jovial acrobatic clown, whose only known name is 'Leaps.' His born ambition is vaulting, and Shakespeare's saying: 'Vaulting ambition that, o'er leaps itself,' is exempemified by his leaps clear over the tick. For a week after joining he only turned singles, but one day he ran down the board with the stride of a giant refreshed with wine, and leaping high enough to jump a board bill, turned two complete revolutions. On returning to the dressing room he found the astonished performers all standing upon their trunks in proud recognition of his prowess. 'Leaps' now insists on a separate dressing room, and desires at his death to become the man in the moon, since, lunar bulk and gravitation being five times less, he could leap five times as high in the moon as he can in this bigger world."

The October 10 *Clipper* contained this report on the Ringling show: "Arkansas keeps up the big record of Missouri. We need all our middle pieces and are crowd-

ed to the hippodrome track. The weather is hot enough to melt a hat band, and the boy who enters the cage to scrub the behemoth of holy writ, notes that he sweats more blood than usual now. Arkansas has taken a moral turn, saloons are closed in most of the towns, and to swear on the street costs a half a century note. Lottie Aymar still nurses her injured knee, and will not ride again this season. Bud Hawes, who was recently married to a young lady of Chicago, will soon put out a specialty show of twelve people, with band, orchestra and a novel street parade. The father of the five Ringlings, a kindly and gentle old gentleman, had been visiting the show, and takes a parent's keen delight in the great success of his boys. We had a white squall at Bentonville, which wet the canvas and drove the crowd off the seats. It was voted the first real storm of a long season and woke the wild animals up. The lions roared back to the thunder, and the cage of parrots began wanting crackers at a rate that would break a bakery. La Role Brothers have a new aerial act for next season, requiring three people. Charles

Howlett has just invented a distinct novelty in the way of foot juggling. Brazil and Alton, whose two first class acts have met with great favor this season, contemplate a return to Europe. Charles O'Dell has invested in an Arkansas mule, which promises to be a wise beast when he gets through training it. The mule has a paint brush tall, and can wink with its ears."

Six stands were played in Arkansas and two in Tennessee. Two Kentucky stands followed before returning to Illinois for three days with the closing stand in Duquoin on October 13.

The total mileage for the season was 10,094 miles. There were 142 one day stands, and one two day stand. The show played 143 cities in 10 states.

The *Baraboo Republic* reported on October 29: "Already the Ringling Brothers are making additions to their great show for the season of 1892. On Tuesday they received by train two trained elephants, three camels, a Russian elk, a mountain lion, a leopard and a tapir. The animals had been on the Sam MacFlinn Great Eastern Circus the past season."

Some material used in this article was provided by Fred Dahlinger, the Circus World Museum, Orin C. King and William Woodcock, Jr.



Foreword: When as a teenager I first began reading the *Billboard* regularly in 1937 the name Chase & Son Circus fascinated me, mainly because it was a somewhat different title among the numerous "somebody's brother" shows. In later years I found Chase & Son to have been one of many small or medium circuses which were framed in the mid 1930s, most of which lasted only a short time. There have been but a few "and son" titled shows in circus history, perhaps the best known being M. L. Clark & Sons which toured off and on until 1945.

An advertisement appeared in the

**A** December 12, 1936 *Billboard* stating Chase & Son Circus wanted to buy blues and starbacks, and a 4, 5, or 6 K.W. light plant. The show wanted to communicate with Bill Speedy, a boss canvasman. The ad was signed by Fielding Graham, 3211 East 31st Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

It wasn't until the January 30, 1937 *Billboard* that details of the new Chase & Son Circus were given. The story datelined Kansas City, January 23, stated Chase & Son Circus was being organized there under the management of Fielding Graham and Buck Smith. Smith had been associated with Fred Buchanan for many years. J. C. Admire was to be general agent and Harry V. Darr manager of advertising cars. Mrs. Admire was to handle merchants tickets and banners.

Further information said the show would open the latter part of April and play the East. It would move on 20 semi-trailer trucks. Big top was to be a 90 with three 30 foot middles; sideshow, 50 with two 20s; marquee 25 x 24. Blues and reserve seats were then at quarters and light plants were being built. Show would carry a 12 piece uniformed band and calliope and the usual line of standard acts. All special paper would be used.

Another item in the same issue stated that Joseph P. Schad had signed with Chase & Son and would appear in the big show doing four acts with special lighting equipment. Schad would also appear in concert and do magic act in side show. Viola Schad would assist him in magic and do mental act. They were to have all new wardrobe. The Schad's public address system would be used on grounds.

An ad in the issue read: "Chase & Son Circus wants for 1937 season, acts for big show that do two or more. Band leader, clowns, boss canvasman, working men in all departments. Acts suitable for side show. Can use immediately, dog and pony trailer. Billers address J. C. Admire, Brazil, Indiana, all others Fielding Graham, Kansas City."

The February 13 *Billboard* headlined a story: "Training stock at Chase quarters."

## SHORT SKETCHES OF FORMER SHOWS

# CHASE & SON CIRCUS 1937-1938

By Joseph T. Bradbury

It said Buck Smith of Chase & Son Circus had arrived from Pattonburg, Missouri, with a new Tangley air calliope and truck, which was built there. It was 14 foot long, had let down sides, shell effect, and was to be used as up town bandwagon and as a luggage truck. The tents had arrived and twenty-two head of stock were in training. The article said that elephants, dogs, ponies, monkeys, pigs, goats, and menage horses were to be on the show. A final note said J. C. Admire reported his entire advance had been engaged. Fourteen men would be ahead, including a special press agent. Four trucks and two sedans were to be used on the advance. Newspaper heralds and heavy billing, including tacking of banners, were to be used.

In early March it was announced the show was booked for Hanibal, Missouri on April 17 and Quincy, Illinois the following day.

An interesting account appeared in the March 13 *Billboard* on the Chase activities. The story noted that Admire had signed Howard Bray as general press agent. Mrs. Bray would assist Mrs. Admire on banners and merchants ticket promotion. Bray would act as cleanup agent on banner and ticket promotions six days in back of the ladies. It noted that Fielding Graham was owner and general manager of a factory heating and plumbing business in Kansas City. Harry Darr, Jr. was to be manager of the second advance car, seven days ahead. There were to be twelve billers and nine vehicles ahead. Buck Smith was to handle press back on show.

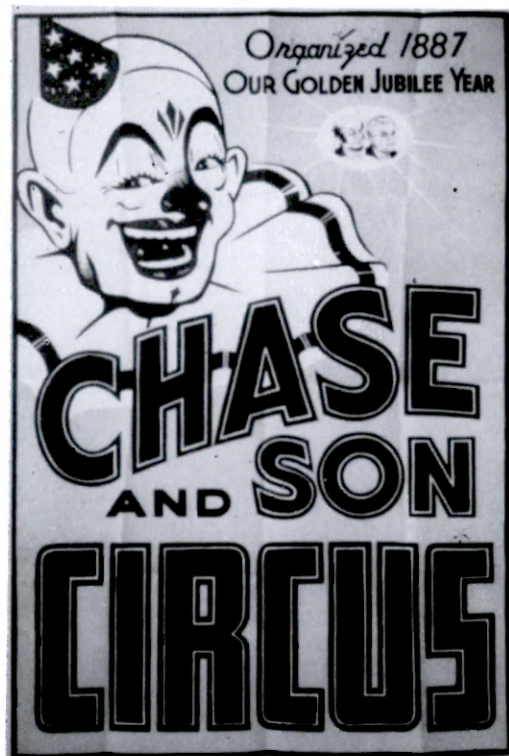
Additional information said truck bodies were being built at Albany, Missouri. Buck Smith had ten men at work. Seats are being built and painted at Kansas City. Animals were being put through their routines daily. More than 140 people had already been engaged for the show. Billy Brown, an old trouper, would have a band of twelve pieces and calliope. Bill Warner would be boss canvas-

man. Blackie Woods would be equestrian director. The Schad family, all around performers; John Delmar, producing clown; Blackie Woods Troupe; Del Simons and the funmakers; and Lord Brothers, clowns, had been engaged.

A week later a *Billboard* advertisement said Chase & Son Circus wanted lunch stand, candy floss, novelties, frozen custard. Everything open except popcorn and candy. The show also wanted musicians, 3 cornets, bass, baritone, and trap drums.

The April 3 *Billboard* said the opening date for Chase & Son would be April 29 at Kansas City, Kansas, instead of April 15 as previously announced. Twenty-two people were then at quarters. Graham had recently returned from Colorado and Tulsa, Oklahoma. At Tulsa he bought several more ponies, making a total of sixteen. Also at quarters were six menage horses, two mules, twelve goats, eight monkeys and five cages of wild animals. A herd of elephants would arrive April 5. Special truck bodies had been completed for every department. The Central Show Printing Co. was doing all the show's printing. It would also publish a four pages newspaper to be used on rural routes and in town billing. All contracts, press material, and mats had been ordered from Central. Date sheets were to be black on yellow.

One sheet Chase poster printed by Central Show Print. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.







Chase & Son calliope truck being used for downtown bally in Washington, Kansas on May 6, 1937.



A house trailer served as the Chase & Son Circus ticket wagon.

Admire wrote to C. A. Lawrence, manager; The Lawrence Press, Elgin, Illinois on February 1, 1937: "In answer to your recent letter, will say, Central has our printing contract for this year, but anything the show could use in the future I will suggest you to the Boss." Lawrence probably had written about getting some of the Chase printing business.

On April 24, 1937 from Atlantic, Iowa, Admire wrote to W. M. Temple, Manager, Central Show Printing Co., Mason City, Iowa: "When you write me, just address letters or envelope, J. C. Admire, care General Delivery, town etc."

"Don't mention show, as I don't want anyone to know we are coming into a town before we get it contracted and billed. So many postmasters in small towns are nosey and talk to theater men."

The May 22 *Billboard* covered the show's opening with headlines, "Chase opening good at Kansas City, Kansas. Dated Greenfield, Iowa, May 15, the story read: "Chase & Son Circus, managed by Fielding Graham, opened at Kansas City, Kansas, auspices of the Boosters Band, April 28, to a nice crowd, notwithstanding rain and cold weather. Seven stands were played in that state, show going as far west as Wamego and Frankfort. Wamego was a darb. Management reported good biz for the big side show and kid show. Show played but one stand in Missouri, at Mound City, May 6, which was followed by a jump of 888 miles to Redford, Iowa. Show will play a few spots in Iowa on its way east."

"The management is charging 25 and 35 cents, with 25 cents for reserves; side and pit shows, 10 cents. Courtesy tickets as matinee stimulants are used. No big towns are being played, it being intention of organization to show in the size towns in which it belongs."

"Show has been billed under direction of H. V. Darr."

No detailed review of the performance was printed in the *Billboard*, however the show used the services of *Circus Magazine* which covered Chase as well as a number of other shows.

The Chase & Son Circus program was listed as follows:

Fifteen minutes of band overture by Prof. Bill Brown and his Famous Kansas City Circus Band.

Grand entry by entire company.

Song. Ring One.

Swinging ladders over all rings.

Graham's three groups of performing ponies in all rings.

Clown number and three trapeze acts.

Blackie Woods, fancy whip cracking.

Schad troupe of famous acrobats.

John Delmar, producing clown and boxing bout.

Fielding's troupe of performing goats.

Concert Announcement.

Miss Mabel Richie, globe rolling.

Performing pachyderms.

Blackie Wood troupe of tumblers and contortionists.

Rocking tables and two tight wire acts.

Whirlwind Baileys, world's fastest tumblers.

Graham's dogs, ponies, monkeys in novelty routine.

Concert announcement.

High Jumping Greyhounds.

Racing monkeys and dogs.

Clown number. Del Simons and his gang.

And closing with a wild west show.

Even though an elephant act was listed it is believed from the best evidence that the show never had an elephant. No doubt an attempt was made to get one or more was not successful. Otherwise, the program listing seems to be correct.

This is in vast contrast to the "history" of the show appearing in the same publication. As usual all of these are highly suspect and that for Chase & Son is no exception. The story said that fifty years previously John Chase with two wagons, a few animals, and ten actors started what became one of the largest circuses in

existence. Mr. Chase married a circus rider and their son, James, was named after their first advance agent, James M. Admire. In former days the circus was transported overland in wagons but now travels in big steel railroad cars. In all probability agent James C. Admire authored this fabricated Chase history.

The show used a newspaper style four page herald printed by Central Show Print. Drawings were of John Chase, founder, and James Chase, manager. It was Chase & Son's Golden Jubilee Year and it featured all standard rings and stages, a blue ribbon horse show, Real Wild West, Great Far East, Museum, Menagerie, and Aviary. Features illustrated in photos and drawings were a \$10,000 troupe of performing stallions, a clown carnival, pigmy ponies, nightingale vocalist, educated dogs and for a special jubilee attraction, Buck's congress of wonders.

In addition to all of the attractions listed, a more elaborate history of the show was given, including the fact that the show graduated from two to three rings in 1930, then in the fall of 1932 purchase was made of a large circus stranded in the East, and the two shows then combined. Aside from the usual highly exaggerated bally, such heralds were interesting items helping to explain the *modus operandi* of the show. There were two coupons to be clipped. The first was a child's ticket which with 15 cents was good for any child under 14 for the afternoon performance. The second was a ladies free ticket to the afternoon show when accompanied by one paid adult ticket.

At its start the 1937 season saw four railroad circuses, Ringling-Barnum, 90 cars; Cole Bros., 40 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, 35 cars; and Barnes-Sells Floto, 30 cars. There were over a score of established motorized and indoor shows out, plus the following truck shows hitting the road for the first time: Donald M.



Campbell's, Chase & Son, Haag Bros., Howe Bros. (owned by Tom Atkinson), Jack Hoxie, Patterson Bros. (J. C. Patterson), and Robert Bros. (Robert J. Vanderbeek). Later in the season Cly Newton would field Moon Bros.

Coverage in the *Billboard* for Chase was heavy at times, sparse at others. The May 29 issue said that Chase & Son, Conroy Bros. and Norris Bros. were all in Iowa. J. C. Admire, Chase's general agent, reported they had an agreement for no opposition nor covering each other's billing paper.

Orin C. King has researched newspaper files in Knasa and provided interesting information on two of the show's stands early in the season. Chase played Wamego, Kansas May 1st. Newspaper ads listed eleven business establishments where merchants tickets could be picked up. These tickets with 15 cents would admit a child at the matinee or a lady free when accompanied by a paid adult. These were the same terms as the coupons with the herald. On April 22 a photo of Pee Wee, a clown with Chase & Son, was printed. A notice on April 29 said the circus would be in town, Saturday and give two performances for the benefit of the Juvenile Band. The story read: "On May 1, Fielding Graham, will bring to Wamego the Chase & Son Circus. Mr. Graham is the brother of X. L. Graham, manager of the Wamego mill. Fielding says the show is not quite the equal of Ringlings in size, but they do have good acts, fine entertainment and your money's worth is guaranteed."

Following was a listing of the establishments handling merchants tickets and note that the circus is being sponsored by the Juvenile Band and they would play a concert preceding each performance. They receive a percentage of the proceeds. The story ended with "come and see the circus."

The *Wamego Reporter* also ran the following after notice: "A good little show. The Chase & Son circus, owned by Fielding Graham, brother of H. L. Graham, was in Wamego last Saturday under the auspices of the Juvenile Band. While the show is not as big as Ringlings, it gives you your money's worth. The acts were good, especially those of two of the girls. They have trained ponies as well. On leaving here they went to Emmett for a matinee and then to Frankfort. They travel by truck and are enroute to Minnesota."

The show played Frankfort, Kansas on May 3, and the *Daily Index* ran the show's advertisement, which listed six local merchants which were handling the so-called courtesy tickets. The following appeared four days before the show arrived: "Circus here Monday. The Chase and Son cir-

# Frankfort

## ONE-DAY ONLY

—AFTERNOON and NIGHT—

# MON. MAY 3

*Our Golden Jubilee Year*  
50 YEARS OF CIRCUS WISDOM



# CHASE AND SON CIRCUS

**STARS** FROM EVERY LAND... A WORLD WIDE COLLECTION OF WONDERS!!  
**ONLY BIG SHOW COMING!!**  
PERFORMANCES 2:00 AND 8:00 P. M.  
REG. ADM.: ADULTS 35c; CHILDREN 25c  
**ASK THESE MERCHANTS FOR COURTESY TICKETS NOW!**

Glynn's Grocery	Harvey's Cafe
Bonifas Bakery	Myers' Service
The Annellen	Daily Index

**LADIES FREE!**  
IN AFTERNOON WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY PAID ADULT  
ALL CHILDREN 15c  
With Merchants' Courtesy Tickets

This ad appeared in the Frankfort, Kansas *Daily Index* on April 28, 1937. Kansas State Historical Society.

cus is coming to Frankfort May 3 for an afternoon and night performance. The afternoon program will start at 2 o'clock and the evening performance at 8 o'clock.

"The circus, which is a motorized show of highest standing in the circus world, has a splendid program of circus feature acts, recruited from all corners of the earth. There will be graceful equestriennes and menage riders, daring acrobats and thrilling aerial acts, tumblers and gymnasts galore, the cutest ponies and trained dogs and monkeys, in short everything that goes to make up a high class program.

"There are a number of funny clowns that will be the delight of the youngsters. The array of clowns will present, among other original numbers, their screamingly comic 'Funny Ford' with real fireworks and everything.

"This circus is known as absolutely clean and above board in every department. There is nothing that could offend the most fastidious taste. There will

be no games of any kind tolerated either on the circus grounds or in the side show. It is a straight out and out circus and one of the best now on tour.

"Doors will open at 1:30 and 7:30 p. m., rain or shine, and there will be grand free exhibitions on the show grounds before each performance."

There was nothing in the *Billboard* concerning the show's activities in June. However two advertisements appeared. In the June 19 issue the ad read that Chase & Son Circus wanted: "Performers to strengthen the big show that do two or more. Punch and Judy and money making mitt reader or suitable acts for side-show. Musicians to strengthen big show band. Concessions of all kinds. Write Walter Baird, legal adjuster. Working men address Joe Holland. Also want fast ticket sellers. Address Chase & Son Circus, c/o Central Show Printing Co., Mason City, Iowa."

The June 26 issue said the show wanted a boss canvasman, electrician and acts for the big show.

Although the trade publication was silent with news from the show for several weeks letters from both Graham and Admire addressed to William Temple, manager of Central Show Printing Co. provide information on the route and other matters. It seems the show would order printed date sheets which would later be attached to lithos or used separately and also the four page heralds, some dated, some undated, and some without the clip-out coupons. An undated letter, but obviously in May, from Graham to Temple read: "We wired you today as follows, rush express two weeks dates to H. V. Darr, Adel, Iowa, enclose in each set two fifty heralds without clipout tickets, May 17th to 29th date. We would be pleased for you to invoice on the shipment immediately when it is made. Also kindly keep invoicing us on the daily heralds that we are sending out."

General agent Admire wrote to Temple from Cambridge, Minnesota on June 5 giving his opinion of the Chase & Son show and asking him for his appraisal of same. It read: "Drop me a line to Grand Rapids, Minnesota at once and let me know if you saw our opera along the line any place, and HOW BAD IT IS. AND HOW WAS THE BUSINESS. or did we have any business?"

"I think our performance is too weak, personally I do, and with no animal flash on the lot don't help us any. A couple elephants would help us out wonderfully.

"Sit down and give me the facts on the outfit. Have never seen it on the lot, or performance.

"Make everything strictly confidential please. I will do the same.

"P.S. Is our performance and appear-



ance as bad as Old Man Atterbury's???

"Our route: Blooming Prairie, Minnesota, June 7, then Chatfield, 8; Zumbrota, 9; Kenyon, 10; Montgomery, 11; Waterville, 12; Lakeville, Sunday 13; Elk River, 14; Princeton, 15; Mora, 16; Cambridge, 17; Lindstrom 16; Pine City, 19. (All Minnesota)

"Will advise you from time to time. Make personal please."

Graham wrote to Temple on June 12 from Waterville, Minnesota: "We are attaching hereto post office money order for \$54.18 to cover your invoice No. 70717 and 70574. Kindly ship via express to H. V. Darr, Grand Rapids, Minnesota, dates for June 28 to July 10 inclusive, also include in the shipment 250 undated heralds with each set. We put an ad in the *Billboard* giving the Central Show Printing Co. as out address and will you please forward any mail to us, Cambridge, June 17; Lindstrom, 18; Pine City, 19; Askor, 20; Moose Lake, 21; Flintwood, 22 (All Minnesota)."

It seems Temple hadn't followed his instructions regarding paper and herald shipments too closely in June to have invoked this rather peeved letter from Admire dated July 4 from Wadena, Minnesota: "Dates you sent to Darr in Hackensack, Minnesota arrived there just 3 days before we showed there today. Dates were ordered 16 days before. On the dates you had it read 'Ask Merchants for Courtesy tickets.' We were playing the town straight afternoon only at 15 and 35 cents, why were the words 'Ask Merchants for courtesy tickets' put on the dates when I said nothing about them."

"On Sunday stands Mr. Temple we play them straight and we do not use any courtesy tickets, so in the future please don't say anything about the courtesy tickets on the dates, for any Sunday town. Just use the words I send in."

"By the dates showing up 3 days before we showed the town we lost around \$100.00."

"The show raises Hell with me for your mistakes, when I plainly write you just what I want. Why should you want to make it read otherwise. These things are all wrong, and I get the hell."

"I make no mistakes in my orders. Or the copies I send in as I read them over time and again and know they are correct before I mail them in. My bill posters are days ahead. And my orders go in 16 days ahead. This gives the printer 8 days to get the stuff to the town. The traveling time from Mason City to Hackensack for parcel post is two days."

"Will you please get me out quick 100 newspaper mats like I use, two column mats and parcel post to me quick to Fergus Falls, Minnesota."

"I am not a fault finder Mr. Temple, but

these things are all wrong. And it just puts me in a nine hole explaining to the show about these losses."

If *Billboard* reports were correct the show's long trek through Minnesota produced the best business so far during the season and most issues carried lengthy accounts of its activities in the state.

The July 3 issue headlined its story: "Chase business good in Minnesota." Dated Princeton, Minnesota, June 26 the article said business with Chase & Son Circus in that state had been exceptionally good. Chatfield, Zumbrota, Waterville, and Montgomery were darbs. Although the night show was lost at Waterville, the matinee had been wonderful. At Mora three performances were given, with two big houses in afternoon and a sellout at night.

Princeton was the banner stand to date, matinee, straw, and sellout at night. Admire and Bray attended the matinee. Both had the banner line loaded. The show was to be on road until late in November and open indoors in Kansas City under auspices in December. The performance was then running an hour and 30 minutes.

A new and bigger top, a 90 with three 30s and several sections of seats had recently been received.

The same issue had this advertisement Chase & Son Circus: "Privileges for sale,

No. 2 side show, an 80 foot line. People from the Howe, Atterbury, and Jack Hoxie show joined at Cass Lake. One act came from Seal Bros. Altogether, there were 42 more people. Business had been big in the iron range country and the show would return there.

Another item mentioned that Admire and his wife had been making St. Cloud their headquarters. St. Cloud was to be on the route of the Graham-Admire indoor show. Admire stated that circuses must be out of Minnesota eighteen days before the state fair. It was noted that Chase had given three shows in both Cass Lake and International Falls.

The same issue carried a Chase ad wanting privilege people in all departments and acts for the side show and big show. Hector Ross, Joe Walker, Joe Hewett, Frank Hadry and Adenoids were asked to wire Humpy Ethridge or Bill Snyder. Four stands were listed.

The mention of Humpy Ethridge indicates how the side show and privileges were being operated as he had a reputation as one of the top grifters of the day. He specialized in shell game and three card monte. In July a "Mr. Ethridge" had been reported as joining the show as a reserve seat ticket seller. Ticket sale inside the big top was also a speciality of the lucky boys.

1937 - "OUR GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR" - 50 YEARS OF CONTINUED SUCCESS - 1937

# CHASE & SON CIRCUS

ALL STANDARD RINGS AND STAGES - BLUE RIBBON HORSE SHOW - ROYAL ROMAN HIPPODROME  
MUSEUM, MENAGERIE AND AVIARY - REAL WILD WEST - AND GREAT FAR EAST SPECTACLE

Chase & Son Circus letterhead used in 1937 and 1938. It is printed in red and black.

lunch stand, frozen custard, novelties, floss, big cat, and prize candy. Jack Walsh wire. Acts and musicians wanted. Pillager, July 1; Ironton, 2; Pequot, 3; Cass Lake, 5; all Minnesota. Turkey Tom wire."

The July 17 *Billboard* noted that Frank Young had closed with the Chase show. His ten year old daughter, Peaches, had been contracted by Lew Rosenthal to present free acts at Minnesota and Wisconsin fairs. Jack Walsh, formerly with Jack Hoxie Circus, had joined Chase as manager of a pit show featuring Jean-Jeanette.

The July 24 issue reported that Chase & Son Circus was enlarged at Cass Lake, Minnesota, July 17. A new spread of canvas included a 90 foot big top with three 40s; side show had a 100 foot bannerline;

The July 31 *Billboard* noted: "The Chase & Son Circus has been doing wonderful business reports J. C. Admire, general agent. Matinee at Gilbert, Minnesota was straw to ring curbs and side show and concessions did splendid business. First spot in the Iron Range was at Bovey which was a big day. At Cook, ring bank matinee and three-quarters house at night in the rain. At Buhl both matinee and night were capacity. At Nashwauk, auspices American Legion, sellouts at both matinee and night. Aurora was slim to good crowds. Two performances were given in afternoon at Tower, and at night there was more than a half house. Last stand in this state will be August 15, then show enters Wisconsin for spots up to September 10. After that, show will head south and have a long season, probably as late as second Saturday in November."

"The show will not lay off, but a company of about 45 people will start on in-



door dates under auspice in auditoriums. Admire will be in advance and his wife will be one of the promoters working 30 days in advance."

Graham wrote to Central Show Print from Hirshbing, Minnesota on July 16: "We are attaching hereto post office money order for \$67.50 to cover invoices No. 71711, 71624, and 71630. Just at the moment we cannot find where we were invoiced for dates and lithographs for July 12 to 24th. Kindly advise us about this."

The numerous and growing reports from the show while in Minnesota quickly ended as it moved over into Wisconsin. The August 14 *Billboard* had only one small note in the "Under The Marquee" section which stated that J. C. Admire of Chase & Son Circus wrote that Gentry Bros. Trained Animal Show was then with the show. This must have been dogs, ponies and possibly monkeys operating under the old Gentry name.

The August 28 *Billboard* said that J. C. Admire, Chase's general agent, had closed after a pleasant and profitable engagement with Graham and Smith. Admire stated that conditions in the smaller cities and towns of Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Kansas were bad.

Admire wrote to an unknown person on August 11: "Dear Friend, closing with Chase show tomorrow. Probably will put out my own outfit. Tent one nighters. Would you be interested in putting in \$250.00 cash. Best wishes, J. C. Admire, c/o General Delivery, Kansas City, Missouri. P. S. will guarantee you business and real interest on investment."

The unidentified "dear friend" may have been Paul Van Pool. Admire was serious in putting out his own show and did so the following season. It operated for a couple of seasons with several variations of the title but always included Admire's name.

In the meantime nothing further appeared in the *Billboard* until the announce-

Chase & Son Circus midway in 1937 in Washington, Kansas.

ment of the show's closing in the September 4 issue: "August 28. Chase and Son closed a successful season in Kansas on August 21 according H. V. Darr, who managed the advertising cars and who has been signed as contracting agent and biller for the 1938 season.

"Early closing, says Darr, was occasioned by two bad blowdowns in one week. The first did considerable damage, but the second one completely destroyed the canvas, etc. In as much as it was so late in the season the management decided not to try to obtain new canvas this fall, but to go into winter quarters until next spring at which time the show will open with all new canvas and will be greatly enlarged for the 1938 season. Practically the entire personnel has been re-engaged for next year. Salaries were paid in full every week, including closing, and everyone received a note of thanks for a swell season."

The same issue published a separate note saying Admire, who had closed with Chase on August 13, had joined Howe Bros. Circus as general agent. Both he and his wife were handling ticket promotions.

The Chase show advertised in the November 20 *Billboard* for big show acts, big show musicians, a boss canvasman and a mechanic for the 1938 season.

#### 1938

The January 15, 1938 *Billboard* reported that Graham bought a white liberty horse, five head of ponies and some midget mules from Fred Wilmot.

The February 26 *Billboard* reported that Buck Smith and crew were painting and overhauling equipment of Chase & Son Circus. Frank Kelsoe and three assistants had been breaking liberty horse act, pony and mule drills, and three menage horses since November. A total of 38 head of stock were owned by the show. Fielding Graham, owner-manager, had returned from the South where he negotiated for two elephants. Big top was to be a 70 with three 30s, replacing the one destroyed in a cyclone the prior year. H. V. Darr was to

be contracting agent with three billers.

The reference to elephants was false as there is no record of elephants ever being on the Chase show.

An advertisement in the March 5 *Billboard* said the show wanted a real banner man to work 24 hours ahead, musicians on all instruments, fast ticket sellers who could make openings and two more clowns. Those interested were to contact Fielding Graham in Kansas City.

A short note also in the same issue advised that Billy Brown would again head the Chase & Son band with 12 men and a calliope.

For the next several weeks the only news from the Chase quarters were a couple of items concerning the band.

The April 30 *Billboard* reported in an article dated Kansas City, Missouri, April 23, that Art Mix and company had been signed by Chase & Son Circus which was to open April 27. Mix was to be featured in concert. Special paper had been printed for Mix. Other show notes said Alex Jones, concessions, would have five butchers. William Heath was to manage the side show with ten stages, Raymond Walton would have the banners and be 24 hours ahead. H. V. Darr would be contracting agent with three billers. George Sweet, chief mechanic, and two assistants had been overhauling all trucks.

Art Mix's wild west troupe had begun the season with the Art Mix Circus but the show had folded in April after only a few weeks on the road. It was the first of many to close early during the 1938 season, the worst of all in modern show history.

A review of Chase & Son's 1938 program did not appear in the trade publications. The *Circus Magazine* was not published after 1937.

Chase again used a newspaper herald and billing paper printed by Central Show Print.

Most of the show's acts and features

Chase & Son side show top and single banner in 1937.





were listed in newspaper coverage for seven stands in Kansas as researched by Orin King. The first of these was for the show's date at St. Marys, Kansas on May 2. The same newspaper mat was used which advertised that children with 15 cents and a merchants' ticket would be admitted to the matinee. Likewise ladies would be free for the matinee when accompanied by a paid adult. In St. Marys 23 merchants were listed as handling the tickets.

An article appearing in the St. Marys *Star* four days ahead said that Art Mix, a brother of Tom Mix, the movie star, would be the feature attraction. Another feature listed was a troupe of performing pigs in charge of Frank Kelsoe. It was noted the circus, the first to show there in years, carried a band and a calliope which would play the streets on circus day.

The show played Washington, Kansas on May 6 where the late Bill Green saw it and took the only set of photos known to exist either for 1937 or 1938. Unfortunately the set isn't very extensive and only a few of the show's vehicles are pictured. The air calliope was housed in a nicely built straight bed truck and the titled ticket wagon utilized a trailer. Several trucks appear in the background of the shot showing the big top center poles up but overall the show seems to be smaller than the 20 semis reportedly used the year before. In all probability slightly more than half that number were present. The placement of the center poles indicated the show was using one 30 ft. middle and two 20s rather than the three 30s earlier reported. The 60 ft. round with one 30 and two 20s later advertised for sale was probably the big top used at the Washington, Kansas stand.

Advertisements for the show's stand at Hill City, Kansas on May 16 had a list of 31 merchants handling the discount tickets, which surely must have been the majority of the local business establishments. The Hill City *Times* said the show featured Frank Kelsoe's troupe of performing pigs, dogs, ponies, and monkeys. A peppy band, clowns and other circus attractions were to be there for the entertainment of the children and grownups who still liked to see the circus.

The following day, May 17, the show, still in Kansas, was at Hoxie. The ad in



50 YEARS OF CIRCUS WISDOM AND SHOWMANSHIP - Founded in 1887



HIGHEST CLASS PERFORMING DOG, PONY AND GOAT ACT IN THE WORLD

Ladies Admitted FREE At Afternoon Show

High Class, Strictly Moral, Chase & Son's Aim

Entertainment of the Highest Nature for Young and Old

A WORD TO THE PARENTS

CLIP THIS MONEY SAVING TICKET

CHILDS COURTESY TICKET

CHASE AND SON BIG CIRCUS

# CHASE and SON CIRCUS

## ON GOLDEN JUBILEE TOUR

Spend Fortune To Exhibit

World Famous Dogs Display Unusual Talents

Only Big Show Coming 50th Year By Coming To Your City Soon

Lower Admission - Give More Show For Less Money

New Equipment Throughout

Pee Wee, Tiny Emperor of Mirth, Heads Funfest

PERFORMANCES DAILY

2 and 8 P. M. : Rain or Shine

CLIP THIS MONEY SAVING TICKET

LADIES FREE TICKET

CHASE AND SON BIG CIRCUS

CHASE AND SON BIG CIRCUS

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CHASE AND SON BIG CIRCUS

surely a record high was set with 49 business establishments handling the discount tickets. The News *Chronicle* carried a larger ad pitching Art Mix and Kelsoe's troupes of performing pigs, dogs, ponies, and monkeys but no reader could be found in its pages.

Finally, the show played Ness City on May 21, and in addition to the large ad the reader in the *Ness County News* was expanded somewhat, noting: "This circus is known as absolutely clean and above board in every department. There is nothing that could offend the most fastidious taste. There are positively no games of any kind tolerated either on the circus grounds or in the side show. It is a straight out-and-out circus and one of the best now on tour." This was an interesting comment in view of brother Humpy and his band of lucky boys being on the show.

It is assumed that after the Kansas tour the show moved into Colorado. Chase advertised in the June 25 *Billboard* wanting a banner man and dancers and acts to strengthen the side show. Those interested were to contact the show in Cripple Creek, Colorado.

The July 2 *Billboard* had a very short notice stating Chase & Son Circus was playing the smaller towns of Colorado and had played Idaho Springs on June 23. This was the last information concerning the show while it was still on the road.

Evidently it closed in that area by time the July 9 issue appeared which had this advertisement: "For quick sale. 4 pony drill, pick out pony, January mule, calliope, light plant, blues, star backs, 60 with one 30 and two 20s. Everything priced to sell, as I am taking out two car minstrel. Fielding Graham."

Graham must not have received many takers as he advertised his property again in the September 10 *Billboard*: "For sale Tanglely calliope and blower, 5 sections star backs, 10 section blues, 60 ft. round top, one 30, two 20s, also 30 x 60, all in good condition. Graham's address was his usual in Kansas City.

Nothing further on Graham or Chase & Son appeared in the *Billboard*. The January 14, 1939 issue reported the Parker & Watts Circus had purchased the Chase & Son Circus trucks.

Graham advertised in the February 18 *Billboard* offering a 43 whistle Tanglely calliope and blower in good condition for \$100; five sections of star backs, ten sections of blues and a big top, all in good condition.

In April 1939 it was announced that Graham would be public relations director with Parker & Watts Circus.

Special thanks to Fred Dahlinger of the Circus World Museum, and Orin C. King for their help in the preparation of this article.



**T**hough by far the largest of their genre, there is a paucity of detailed, in depth writing about individual editions of the Barnum, Ringling, and their combined circuses during this century's first three decades. Hence, Fred Pfening Jr. is due much applause for his splendid account of the 1913 Ringling show in the March-April *Bandwagon*.

Several matters pertaining to wagons, however, require correction and clarification, to wit:

### Rhino Cages

Contrary to what is stated in the caption beneath the rhino cage photo (p. 13), that wagon was not used to send Indian rhino "Bill" from Ringling to Barnum in 1913. If a circus wagon was used, it would have been the one shown here in photo No. 1 taken on the Forepaugh-Sells circus in 1910. I reach this conclusion based on a rationalization of the facts as known with a sprinkling of surmise (hopefully informed) which I hope to here explore in the best tradition of the circus wagonophile.

Note that the side boards of the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells cage (photo No. 1) read "Only Living Armored Rhinoceros In Captivity." The word "Armored" (may not show clearly here but definitely on the upper right side board) is critical to these observations because it is a proper adjective to describe the skin of the Great Indian one-horned rhinoceros. And, "Bill" was the only one of that species on a circus in America this century. (See photo No. 2). We figure he went out with Forepaugh-Sells again in 1911, riding in the

# RINGLING BROS. 1913 SOME OBSERVATIONS AND CORRECTIONS

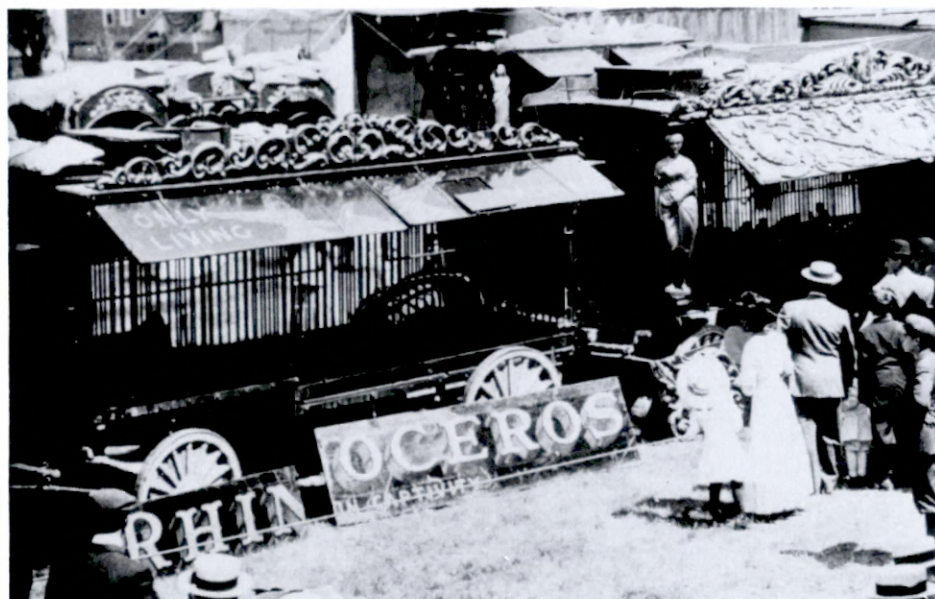
By Richard J. Reynolds III

same wagon as the year before. After that circus was shelved forever in Baraboo at the end of 1911, "Bill" and this same cage went to Ringling for 1912. Its parade order for that year listed, "Forepaugh Rhino Den No. 27;" an obvious reference to its usage during the two preceding seasons. The same was true in 1913.

In addition to "Bill" in Forepaugh No. 27, the 1912 and 1913 Ringling shows had a second rhino (a two-horned African black) that rode in cage No. 66. It is shown here in photo No. 3. Documents and photographs clearly establish that this unique wagon was built for the Ringlings in early 1903 and was with their namesake circus for most of the time through 1918. In the mid-1920s it could be found at the Bridgeport winter quarters sadly deteriorated and obviously destined for oblivion.

But, let us return to Forepaugh-Sells No. 27. Its origin was with Barnum. We know this with certainty and can place it there as early as 1893. Taking it back before that is a tougher proposition. A Bar-

Photo No. 1. Rhino den No. 27 (left) on Forepaugh-Sells in 1910. It was on Barnum & Bailey in 1909 and earlier. Dunn-Tibbals collection.



num & Bailey open menagerie photograph, obtained by your writer from the late Ralph Miller and dated by him as 1893, shows, in its background, four of the plain Barnum cages, so-called for their downright dowdiness in comparison to the elegant Fielding tableau dens on that circus. The late Richard Conover was of the view that our subject wagon

on was one of the plain cages shown in the 1893 picture, and I agree. Though its number cannot be seen, it had the same physical characteristics that we will explore momentarily.

In his paper, *The Fielding Cages Of 1883, Bandwagon*, March-April, 1986, Stuart Thayer said that the plain cages dated back on Barnum as far as 1873 and that during the 1880s and 1890s were numbered in the fifties. Sure enough, the 1886 Barnum & London route book identified a No. 57 as one of two rhino cages on the circus that year. The other was No. 73, but we can eliminate it as a candidate for our subject wagon, for it was an ornately carved Fielding tableau-den featuring corner statues of men holding snakes. While in England, in connection with the public sale of shares in his circus, James A. Bailey had an inventory prepared of all his circus properties. Dated February 4, 1899 (copy in Pfening archives), it listed all the cages by number but without designating which animals rode in each. Among them was a number 57, presumably the same as rhino cage No. 57 of 1886.

Later in 1899 or in 1900, Barnum & Bailey renumbered all its cages. In his Fielding paper, Thayer said the old plain cages got new numerals in the seventies. And, he has a 1900 Barnum and Bailey list with No. 75 shown as the rhino wagon. Better yet is a photograph from the Conover collection of a side walled Barnum menagerie. Conover said it was taken sometime before 1908 but after the show returned to America. Though of rather poor quality, it shows our subject wagon; and on its rear can be read the number 75.

We turn now to a series of five rhino photographs taken on Barnum & Bailey, one for sure in 1905 and the others either then or within a few years thereafter. At least two of the cameramen were F. W. Glasier and Charles Andress. The latter's photo was published in *Billboard* for October 13, 1906, p. 28. These five photos, plus the 1893 shot and the one from ca. 1903-07 in the Conover collection, show a wagon with a drop deck floor. All reveal the same iron bar door, an unusual swing out or in affair, set among the regular vertical bars about halfway along the left





side with the horizontal reinforcing bar interrupting its wagon length course to form a frame around the door. And, those very same features can be seen in No. 27 (photo No. 1). Hence, this writer concludes that No. 27 was the same as post-1900 Barnum No. 75 and that it went back at least to 1893. A more tenuous assertion is that it was No. 57 on the 1886-1899 editions of the Barnum circus. We know only that such numeral would have fit the plain cage numbering scheme of those years and that a No. 57 did carry a rhino in 1886, a coincidence which lends at least a scintilla of credence to the assertion.

Before leaving the subject of No. 27's origin, we should touch upon one more possibility, albeit a remote one in my judgment, namely that it came from the 1907 and earlier Forepaugh-Sells circus. That would mean that it was not one of the old plain Barnum cages. Fuel for that idea is to be found in a letter Otto Ringling wrote to his brother Charles on November 7, 1907 (Braathen collection). The Baraboo showmen had just purchased Barnum & Bailey and were temporarily shelving Forepaugh-Sells. (They recreated it in 1910). Otto had gone to the Bridgeport winter quarters to examine the Barnum properties. This letter was one of two that reported his findings. In it he disdainfully referred to the group of cages that included No. 75 as "these bum plain cages. . . [which we should] . . . throw out." He recommended replacing them with the best from Forepaugh.

It is generally held that Otto Ringling's recommendation was carried out. That is not to say, however, that every single one of the plain cages was junked for 1908. Based on the evidence detailed above, I must conclude that at least one of them sur-

Photo No. 2. Ringling's Hindu rhino cage No. 66 built for the 1903 season and shown here ca. 1909. Author's collection.

vived the purge and wound up as No. 27 on the 1910-11 Forepaugh-Sells and 1912-13 Ringling circuses. Photo No. 1 shows that it had a carved skyboard in 1910. That adornment may well have been taken from 1907 Forepaugh-Sells equipment because the skyboard of the same wagon on Barnum in 1893 was a plain wooden one with painted scroll.

Photo No. 3. Great Indian rhino "Bill" as he looked on RBBB in the early 1920s. Atwell photo from author's collection.



Barnum and Bailey played Battle Creek, Michigan on August 4, 1909, and a photo was taken in a topless menagerie. In the background, though partially obscured, can be seen a cage wagon whose side boards had the very same painting of natives fighting a rhino that we see in Photo No. 1 taken the next year on Forepaugh-Sells. Also, the ventilation window in the upper right side panel was the same in both the 1909 and 1910 photographs. Where the word "Armored" appeared on the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells side board, the 1909 Barnum and Bailey lettering read, "Two, . . . (second word obscured) . . .," but obviously "Two Horned" for the African black rhino which the Barnum circus most definitely carried in 1909. Hence, we know with certitude that the 1909 Barnum rhino den was shipped to Baraboo where Forepaugh-Sells was being recreated during the winter of 1909-1910. When it arrived, all the paint shop had to do to fix it up for Indian rhino "Bill" was to remove the second horn from the portrait of the rhino and print "Armored" in place of "Two Horned."

With Barnum & Bailey's 1909 rhino den having thus gone west to Baraboo to become No. 27 on the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells aggregation, what did the former do for a rhino cage? Largely based on the process of elimination, it is my opinion that they got a new one; and I believe it to have been that shown on page 13 of the Pfening article. It was a wider, heavier, and more modern looking wagon than either of the older ones pictured here. Unfortunately, we have never seen a photograph of it on the Barnum show to support this premise. The picture used in Pfening's article is thought to have been taken around 1920 on Ringling-Barnum where it became the combined show's vehicle for hauling Indian rhino "Bill." It was destroyed in a February, 1924 Bridgeport fire; and "Bill" made his last three tours in a new cage wagon, No. 78, which saw service on Ringling-Barnum as late as 1948.

As Pfening correctly noted in his paper, "Bill" was sent from the Ringling to the Barnum show on July 5, 1913. We know that from a Ringling document stating that "a rhino" was shipped on that date. We know that it went to Barnum & Bailey because they needed to replace theirs which had just died, and Ringling had an extra one. We figure it was "Bill" because both Joe Heiser and Col. Bill Woodcock remembered that he was a Barnum animal in the later teens. What we do not know is how he was transported from Ringling to its sister circus. Because No. 27 (photo No. 1)





started the 1913 Ringling season per the parade order but is not listed in the later loading order, the most logical conclusion is that he went to Barnum riding in No. 27 as Pfening suggested. What then happened to that cage? Did it continue to transport "Bill" (a simple solution)? Or, was he switched from No. 27 into Barnum's bigger and newer rhino wagon which had been made empty by the death of its two-horned occupant the month before?

Regardless of how and where No. 27 spent the remainder of the 1913 season, we must point out that a cage No. 27 (presumably that in photo No. 1) was back on Ringling in 1914. It was listed in their parade line-up for that season whereas No. 66, their usual, and presumably preferred, rhino cage was not. Whether No. 66 was carried but not paraded, we cannot say. However, it was definitely with the circus in 1915-1918. We have no trace of No. 27 after 1914.

For an overall review of the cage wagons employed by Forepaugh-Sells in 1910-1911, readers are directed to Fred D. Pfening III's fine article, *The Grand Parade of 1910 and 1911, Forepaugh Sells Circus, Bandwagon*, May-June, 1968, p. 16. There, the author discussed rhino cage No. 27. He expressed uncertainty over its origin and suggested a pre-1910 Ringling connection. However, that was written before we discovered persuasive evidence of its coming from Barnum & Bailey. For assistance in that regard, special thanks are due Stuart Thayer and the doyen of the wagonphiles, the late Richard E. Conover.

#### Hippo Cage No. 42

In the 1913 Ringling parade order as presented by Pfening (page 10), hippo wagon No. 42 is said to have come from Forepaugh Sells. That is incorrect. No. 42 (shown here in photo No. 4) was the one that hauled the hippo in 1913, and it was always a Ringling cage—never Fore-

Photo No. 4. Ringling hippo den No. 42 as it was configured ca. 1913 with bay window. Tibbals collection.

paugh-Sells. Records from the Baraboo winter quarters, preserved in the Kasiska collection, prove it was built for the Baraboo brothers' 1903 campaign. The Moeller wagon repair records, on file at the Circus World Museum, tell us for \$282.50 that it got an entirely new body during the winter immediately preceding the 1917 season. Photographs show that the new one was wider and had no bay window like that shown in photo No. 4, being of uniform breadth throughout. Fortunately, the attractive Egyptian flavored sky board and corner statues were installed on the new edition. Thus configured, it saw regular "river horse" service on the post-1918 combined show. Alas, like the ex-Barnum 1910 vintage rhino den shown on page 13 (March-April issue), this attractive hippo wagon also burned up in the 1924 fire at the Bridgeport winter quarters.

#### Giraffe Wagon No. 78

Pfening stated (page 15) that giraffe wagon No. 78 did not arrive until after the loading order was compiled and was not listed therein. That was an error because No. 78 was listed—with "two little giraffes" (See: 1st section, Flat #39, page 14 of Pfening article).

The two small giraffes were the ones described by Charles Ringling in his letter of July 15, 1913 (quoted by Pfening, page 15), as having "arrived Saturday." We must figure the showman meant Saturday, July 12, 1913 when the circus played Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The Moeller wagon records suggest that two different giraffe wagons were used in 1913 in connection with the young giraffes. From the Pfening article (page 4), we see that No. 78, one of the two listed on the loading order, was re-

paired for the show before the beginning of the season. This should mean that it was on the train, albeit empty, when the show left Baraboo or was shipped to it while it was in the East where the giraffes were to land. However, if two giraffes were expected per the Ringlings' order to Hagenbeck in December, 1912 (document in the Kasiska collection), why carry only one extra giraffe wagon, No. 78? The answer must find its denouement in considerations of cost savings and operating efficiencies.

Back in those days giraffes were notorious for dying in transit, and the two Ringling bound animals still had a risky ocean voyage ahead of them when the time came for the circus to hit the road. Aware of the perils at sea and having lost many giraffes themselves, the brothers probably decided to have on hand only one extra, empty wagon in case only one, or neither, of the cameleopards made it. When both landed safely and went into the required period of quarantine around the end of May, it is this writer's belief that the Ringlings promptly directed the Moellers back in Baraboo to build a new giraffe wagon and ship it to the circus pronto. That would explain the Moellers' July 22, 1913 invoice for "... [making] ... giraffe wagon, and new body and gear ... [and shipping it] ... to Great Bend, Kansas." Pfening referred to the document (page 15) but erroneously called the wagon No. 78. That one was already aboard the train. We do not know the number of the new wagon shipped by the Moellers. Despite what the invoice called for, it apparently could not make the connection for Great Bend because a Ringling journal entry (Kasiska collection) recorded the payment of an express bill for delivering a giraffe wagon from Baraboo to Denver on July 29th, three days after Great Bend.

What all of this tells us, I think, is that the two small giraffes were both transported in No. 78 from the time of their arrival at Fort Wayne (July 12th) until the new wagon arrived in Denver (July 29th). Since the loading order listed only two giraffe wagons, No. 82 for a "big giraffe" (1st section, flat #40) and No. 78 for the "two little giraffes" (1st section, flat #39), and having ever in mind that No. 78 had been repaired in Baraboo before the season began, I am compelled to the view that the loading order was prepared between Ft. Wayne and Denver before the new giraffe wagon arrived. Thereafter, the three giraffes each had a separate wagon.

In conclusion, your writer wishes to thank Fred Dahlinger, Jr., Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Fred D. Pfening III, Stuart Thayer, and Howard C. Tibbals for their help with sundry matters pertaining to the circus wagons discussed herein.



# CIRCUS WAGON HISTORY FILE

## THE BARNUM & LONDON NEW YORK TABLEAUS: RECENT RESEARCH

By Stuart Thayer

Writing in the January-February 1986 *Bandwagon* Fred Dahlinger, Jr. suggested that in 1882 Fielding Brothers Wagon Company built four tableaux for the Barnum & London Circus. Known as the "New York Tableaus" since at least the 1886 route book, their subsequent history is fairly-well documented in various sources.

Recent research leads us to offer a different scenario for the origin of the quartet. We think that Fielding only built two wagons in 1882. They joined two others already on the show and the four have since shared the "New York" appellation.

We begin our version of the history of these vehicles with the pre-season description of Howes' Great London Circus in the *New York Clipper* supplement of 19 April 1873. It states, "In the street procession, which will be large and imposing, will be seen four new chariots recently imported from London."

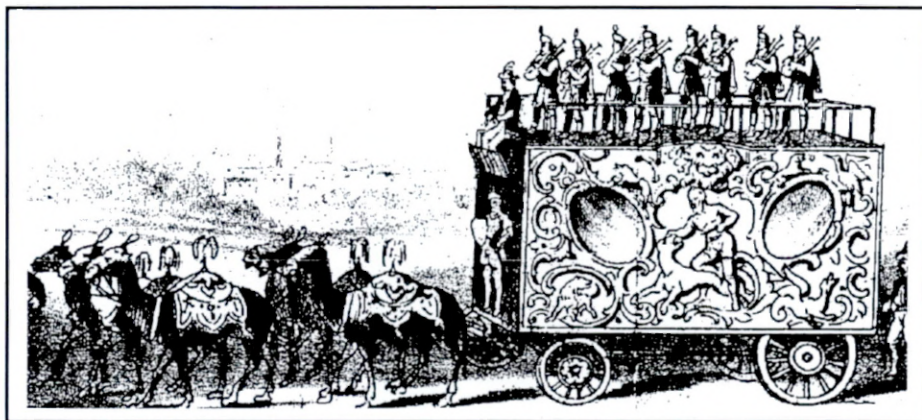
The Howes circus had arrived from England in 1871 with the nucleus of one of the most splendid street displays of all time. Their English-made wagons included the "Car of Commerce" and the "Chariot of India," the two great telescoping tableaux, one topped by a globe, the other by a wooden elephant. Just two years later they imported the four wagons of the *Clipper* note. While it has no bearing here, we would not

Figure 1. The "Car of Jubilee" tableau (top), and the "Chariot of Houris" tableau (bottom) as shown on an 1882 Barnum & London litho. Pfening Archives.

be surprised if all these importations came from the same English shop.

was rigged, according to Richard Conover in *The Fielding Bandchariots*, but for our purpose the sheriff's list-of property has in it "four London Wagons." This mention of them is the first since the 1873 *Clipper* reference.

In the winter of 1878-1879 Cooper &



The Howes' Great London Circus ran into financial problems in January 1877 and was sold at a sheriff's sale. The sale

Figure 2. Tableau "Caledonia" as depicted in the 1881 Barnum & London fold-out parade advertisement. Pfening Archives.



Bailey purchased the Great London and thereby gained ninety per-cent of their 1879 parade, which was an awesome display, one which could have held its own against any twentieth-century presentation.

In 1880 they distributed a lithograph that illustrated all the non-cage parade wagons. This was reproduced on the cover of the November-December 1987 *Bandwagon*. This lithograph illustrates the "London Wagons" for the first time.

Figure 1 is an 1882 Barnum & London lithograph that we believe shows two of the 1873 imports. The one at



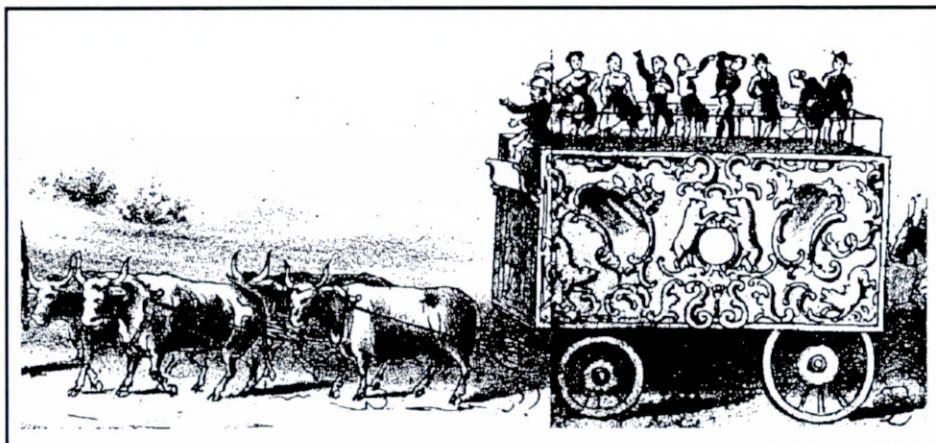


Figure 3. Tableau "King Rex" as seen in an 1880 Cooper & Bailey courier. Circus World Museum collection.

the top was called "The Car of Jubilee" by Cooper & Bailey because it carried a group of plantation singers and dancers. These were also advertised by Barnum & London in 1881, but by the time of our subject lithograph Swiss Bell Ringers had been substituted. This wagon had a long history with the Barnum show. It was sold to J. H. Garrett in 1909. Its existence was last recorded in September 1924 when it passed from Golden Bros. Circus to George W. Christy. The reader will understand that when we speak of the history of these vehicles we are often giving the history of just their carvings, decorating as they did several wagon bodies over the years.

The wagon at the bottom of figure 1 was called "The Chariot of Houris," by Cooper & Bailey. In the Muslim religion the belief is that all faithful

Figure 4. Tableau "King Rex" as illustrated in the 1881 Barnum & London fold-out. Pfening Archives.



men are supplied with beautiful virgins once they reach Paradise. These women are called houris. A carved personification of one of them is on each side of this tableau. Atop the vehicle, both on Cooper & Bailey and Barnum &

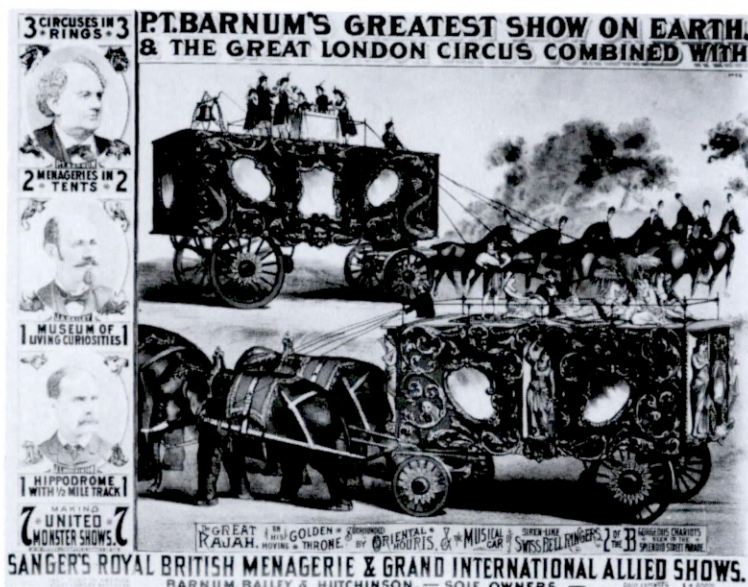


Figure 5. Lithograph showing the two "New York" tableaus built by Fielding for the 1882 Barnum & London parade. Pfening Archives.

London, was a rajah and a bevy of Near-Eastern dancing girls. Dahlinger

speculated that this wagon burned in the 1887 winter quarters fire in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Richard Conover thought it was sold to John Robinson in the 1890's. We favor the Conover version.

Figure 2, from an 1881 Barnum & London fold-out parade booklet, shows a wagon called "Caledonia" when it was on Cooper & Bailey. Caledonia is the ancient name for Scotland and the wagon carried a group of Scottish bagpipers. This tableau is not in the 1882 lithograph set and apparently was not used after 1881. The center carvings are of a man in a toga accompanied by a dog or a wolf. We do not know to what this alludes.

Figure 3 illustrates the "Chariot of King Rex" as it appeared in the 1880 Cooper & Bailey and 1881 Barnum & London couriers. When it was with Cooper & Bailey this wagon carried a mardi-gras group, including King Rex and a coterie of revelers wearing *papi-mache* heads and motley costumes. It was copied from the New Orleans celebration of course, which dated back to 1857. Figure 4 shows the wagon as it was in the 1881 fold-out advertisement. The reader will notice that the mardi-gras figures have been replaced by what the circus called "Jubilee Singers and Cabin Shouters." These had graced the Car of Jubilee on Cooper & Bailey. As with Caledonia, this wagon doesn't appear after 1881.

All four of the London Wagons were built with the wheels completely under the box body. For 1882 Jubilee and Houris were rebuilt so that the track was outside the box. This not only allowed more room in the interior, but led to greater stability. In all probability, the boxes were new and the carvings transferred.

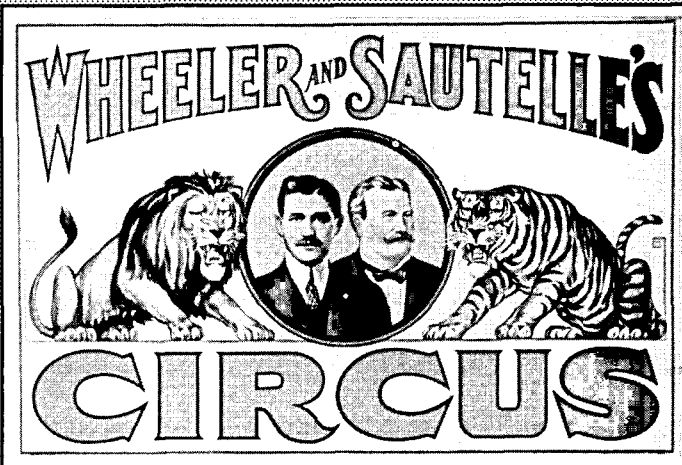
That same winter (1881-1882) two new tableaus were built by Fielding, the so-called "New York" tableaus. We illustrate these in figure 5. With their addition the number of tableaus on Barnum & London remained at four.

In the 1886 Route Book all four wagons are referred to as the "New York Tableaus." It must be from this that subsequent commentators have called them that, and have assumed that they were the products of one shop at one time. A final note: two of these 1873 imports--Houris and Caledonia--had corner figures. This brings to three the number of circuses introducing such decoration in that same year, Howes' Great London, Van Amburgh and Adam Forepaugh.





C-1900 Stuart Sears collection



C-1931 Pfening Archives

## PORTRAIT LITHOS

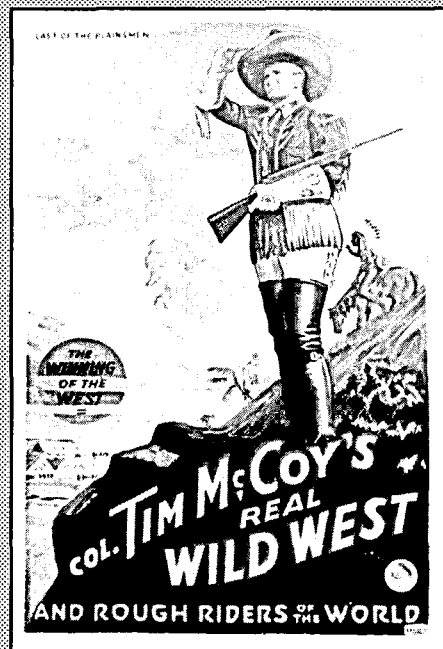


1926 Pfening Archives

C-1900 Ken Harck collection

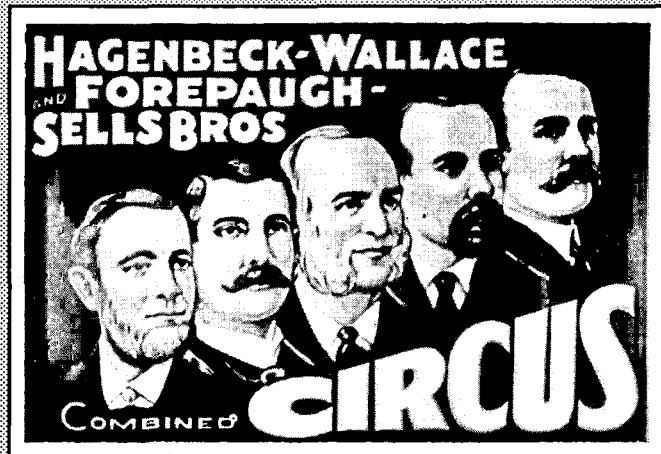


C-1923 Tibbals-Dunn collection



1938 Pfening Archives

1935 Pfening Archives





**T**he first performance of F. J. Taylor's Great American Double Circus, in 1892 of which we have a record was reported by the Seneca, Kansas, *Courier-Democrat*. "F. J. Taylor's Circus gave performances in this city last Tuesday [May 24]. The performance was indeed excellent in every detail and merits the patronage of the people in general. It is one of the cleanest shows that has visited this town for many years. They carry no gambling games nor fakes, and the members of the company are a gentlemanly set of fellows. The only thing that seems to be a hoodoo is their concert given after the show, it is a fake and should either be improved or discarded."

An ad in the *Courier-Democrat* on May 13 was used with slight variation in all the towns played: "Wait For the Big Shows. An Entire City by Itself—10 Times Larger Than Ever. F. J. Taylor's Great American DOUBLE CIRCUS. Will Exhibit At SENECA, TUESDAY, MAY 24."

"Note—Owing to arrangements made by the American Showmen's Pool League this will be the only big show to visit Nemaha county this year. \$10,000 That we give the best circus performance ever seen in the West. 50 Star Performers—5 Funny, Famous Clowns."

"A show to think and talk about. The greatest number of favorites ever assembled under canvas. A great holiday of rest and recreation for everyone. We guarantee to all a most enjoyable, moral, refined and artistic entertainment."

"JIP AND SAMSON. The Mightiest and Biggest Brutes that Breathe. *The Goliaths of the Giant Tribe*. The largest elephant and camel in the world. JIP, the grand old battle-scarred war elephant. SAMSON, the tallest sky-towering camel the world ever saw."

"Only Fan-Eared Elephant in Captivity. Baby Camel Only Ten Months Old. And a menagerie containing all the animals worth seeing under the sun. A Grand Double Circus of two exalted circus companies. Grandest of hippodrome specialties. A GRAND FREE STREET PARADE"

"A street pageant one mile long, crimsoned with the radiant luster of the noon day sun reflecting scenes more grand than king or conqueror ever beheld. Tons upon tons, block after block, a solid moving

# THE ONLY TRIPLE-HORNED UNICORN A RACING HERD of WISEST ELEPHANTS

Chapter 10, Part One, 1892

By Orin Copple King

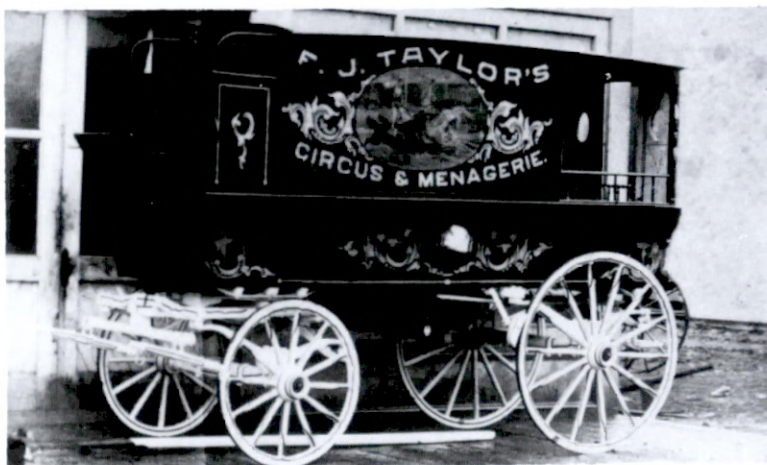
Copyright © 1990 Orin Copple King

mass of wealth and splendor. Every nation represented. Noble knights and warriors. Ladies fair on prancing horses. Open dens of wild and ferocious animals hungrily surveying the surging crowds. A herd of camels and elephants, blooded horses from Asia, England and Kentucky. Comic clowns and mules. Bands of music filling the air with melody—a sight worth coming many miles to see.

"A Free Flight to the Clouds Each Day. Two Performances Daily, Rain or Shine. Doors open at 1 and 7 p. m., performance commences one hour later. Don't let other advertisements mislead you; we never disappoint. ADMISSION To both Circus and Menagerie, Only 25 and 35 CENTS."

The star of the show was John Bachelor, as announced in a handout appearing in the May 13 *Centralia Journal*: "On the 25th we are to have F. J. Taylor's double circus, museum and menagerie, who will show in Centralia for one day only. John Bachelor, the champion leaper of the world,

This Taylor wagon was typical of those used by mud shows in the 1890s. Pfening Archives.



will appear at each performance. In the menagerie will be seen a baby camel only 10 months old, and a rare collection of wild and living animals. Come in time to see the parade."

After the show had come and gone the *Journal* reported that, "The show Wednesday, was as good as could be expected of a wagon show. They played afternoon and evening and left during the night. The farmers did not attend as well as was expected on account of the good weather. About 500 people did attend in the afternoon and about half as many in the

evening."

The advance was handled by Dick Horton who was in Frankfort May 2, preparing for the exhibitions of May 26.

An often repeated handout appeared in the *Frankfort Bee* on May 19. "Taylor's circus is the best one ring show in America. Ask any newspaper man. Ask any traveling man and they will tell you that F. J. Taylor has the best, neatest, cleanest circus on the road."

"Taylor's circus while small, was very good, and well worth the admission charged," in the opinion of the *Bee*. "Every feature of the show was first-class."

Apparently the crowds for the exhibitions at Blue Rapids, May 27, were small for the *Times* related that: "The biggest delegation that came to the circus was the Taylor party that arrived before seven o'clock in the morning."

Between the performances some of the circus people had a ball game with some of the local boys, but the elephant had the most fun.

The *Times* reported that: "Taylor's elephant amused his beautiful self last Friday morning, before the tents were up, by pulling the blue grass from the open lots and Mr. Hart's yard, and rubbing the bark off the cottonwood trees, trying to get a polish on his complexion in time for the street parade."

Two handouts were used repeatedly. The *Clyde Argus* used them both on the same page to herald the exhibitions of May 31: "A First Class Show.

"To the Public.

"Craig, Missouri, April 28, 1892.—F. J. Taylor's circus and menagerie gave two exhibitions in our city today. The entertainment was in all respect first class and worth more than the price of admission. All the attaches from the pro-



prietor down are perfect gentlemen and entirely worthy of the full respect, confidence, consideration and patronage of any community.

F. J. Brofield, Mayor.

E. J. Kellogg, City Attorney."

"Taylor Is Coming.

"On May 31 we are to have the well known and ever welcome F. J. Taylor's Great American double circus, museum, caravan, and royal menagerie who will spread their sea of canvass in Clyde for one day only. They have without a doubt the largest and best one ringed circus and menagerie in America. They carry fifty star performers and five funny famous clowns, they do not allow any gambling games to follow them. John Batcheler the champion leaper of the world will appear at each performance. In the menagerie will be seen a baby camel only ten months old, and a rare collection of wild and living animals."

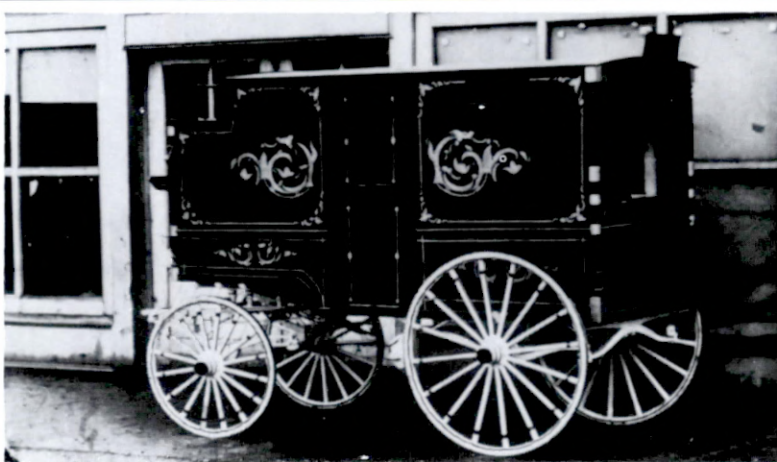
The May 12 Clyde *Farmers' Voice* ran a handout that lauded the talents of the showman.

"Hon. F. J. Taylor is the same success as a showman as he is and has been in other lines of business. He never fails in anything. His first term as mayor of Creston [Iowa] only served to call him again to the place after retirement of a year or two. As a grain merchant, as a speculator, as a live stock auctioneer, as a farmer, as a bank director, and as a public spirited citizen Frank Taylor is a marked success. Long before the entrance of his large show tent was open last Saturday evening there was a crowd in waiting larger than the seats inside would accommodate. After all had crowded on the seats who had a place, hay was brought in and all the space not covered by the ring was strewn therewith and all who could gain admittance, sat down on the hay. Many went away unable to get comfortable sitting or standing room. It is needless to say that the show was good. His show was good the first year he traveled and every year since it has been improved. All should see Taylor's show wherever and whenever it appears.—Creston, Iowa, *Independent-American*.

"This show will be in Clyde on Tuesday, May 31."

Following circus day the *Voice* expressed the opinion that, "The circus Tuesday was pretty well patronized, and was a fairly good show."

The July 7 Norton *Champion* ran Taylor's ad with an illustration that should have filled the tents on circus



Ticket wagon used by the F. J. Taylor Circus. Pfening Archives.

day, July 13. Featured was a horse walking on four stilts and another horse with the reins in its mouth standing Roman style on the backs of two other horses running at top speed. The *Champion* ran the ad and one handout on the 7th and never again mentioned Taylor's Great American Double Circus.

Positive identification of the elephant is difficult. In advertisements it was the "Only Fan-Eared Elephant in Captivity." In a handout used extensively from July on, the show bragged that, "The securing of the umbrella eared elephant, the only one in America, at an enormous outlay of cash, is evidence that the manager of this great show is bound to exhibit to its patrons something new and worthy of the great name and reputation it already has."

Fan-Eared? Umbrella-Eared? It doesn't matter, for an elephant is always worth a look.

Frank J. Taylor. Circus World Museum collection.



Taylor did satisfactory business everywhere in Kansas and better than satisfactory at many dates. The Burr Oak *Herald*, speaking of the exhibitions of July 26, reported: "Taylor's show has come and gone. There were more People here than could yet into the tent, and the sale of tickets was stopped when there were still two or three hundred people unsupplied. At night it was not nearly so badly crowded. The performance was very good, and some

of the gymnasts were as good as we ever saw. There was no disturbance, and all went on with quietness and good humor."

The Waterville *Telegraph* noted that, "There seems to have been some thieves in town Saturday [circus day, August 6], but from all that is said no one thinks they were traveling with the circus." It speaks well of Taylor's show, for usually every evil was blamed on the circus. "Taylor's circus gave two excellent performances in town on Saturday, both of which were well patronized by the public.

*Williamson's Eagle*, Beattie, August 12, had the final say on Taylor's extravaganza: "F. J. Taylor's circus has come [August 9] and gone. A large concourse of people attended both the afternoon and evening performances, and without division they pronounced it a splendid entertainment."

Not one word of condemnation appeared in the Kansas press.

F. J. Taylor's Great American Double Circus played the following confirmed dates in Kansas: May 24, Seneca; May 25, Centralia; May 28, Greenleaf; May 30, Clifton; May 26, Frankfort; May 27, Blue Rapids; May 31, Clyde; June 2, Washington; June 3, Hanover; July 13, Norton; July 15, Logan; July 16, Phillipsburg; July 21, Osborne; July 22, Downs; July 26, Burr Oak; July 27, Mankato; July 28, Courtland; July 30, Concordia; August 2, Miltonvale; August 3, Clay Center; August 4, Leonardville; August 5, Randolph; August 6, Waterville; August 8, Marysville; August 9, Beattie.

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The Great Parisian Shows played at least two dates in Kansas in 1892, both of which were in the extreme southeastern corner of the state. No display ads appeared for either date.

The July 1 Scammon *Globe-Miner* published all of the advance information in one short paragraph.



"The Great Parisian Shows are billed for Scammon July 6th, afternoon and evening. This show is one that never fails to please its patrons. This show has justly won a reputation for honesty, they allow no 'rapid change men,' 'soap peddlers,' 'three card monte,' in or about their tents."

The show told the public what would not be seen, but failed to mention anything that might be presented.

"The Circus is gone," the *Globe-Miner* reported on July 8. "Everybody and his wife or friend or nearest relative was at the circus Wednesday evening."

On July 2, the *Baxter Springs News* ran a group of advertising lines inter-mixed with the news of the town touting the exhibitions of July 8: "If you can't go to the 4th of July celebration perhaps you can attend the circus at Baxter next Friday."

"The show coming next Friday is highly recommended, and at the low price of 25 cents ought to be well patronized."

"No fakirs, bummers or side attractions of any kind are allowed with the show next Friday. Fix up the babies and come."

"The Great Parisian shows, ancient caravan and monster museum will give two of its celebrated performances in Baxter next Friday."

"The great Parisian shows, ancient caravan and monster museum will exhibit in this city on Friday July 8th. This promises to be the best 25¢ entertainment ever given here as they carry 60 head of stock besides dogs, goats, donkeys, etc; also a complete list of artists in every line. This show supports no fakers and has a contract with the city to license none on that day."

After circus day the *News* related that, "The Parisian circus, under the management of Madame De Bonnaire, gave two very satisfactory performances here last Friday to good audiences."

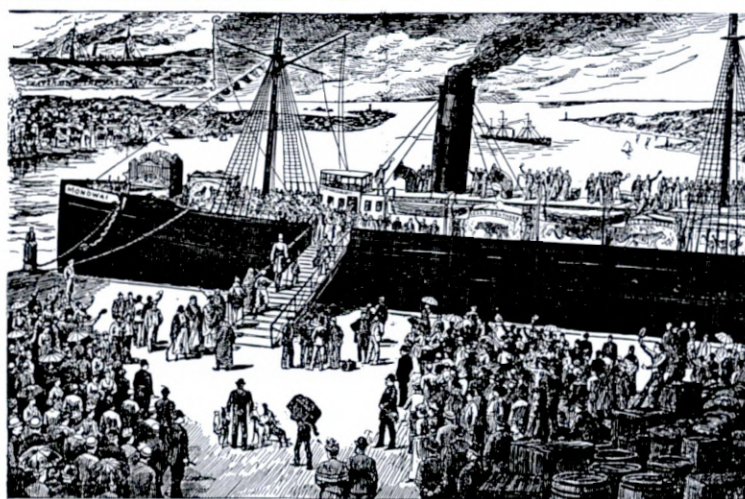
The above is all that is known of the Great Parisian Show.

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Erie, Kansas, in 1892, had two newspapers both of which ran nickel and dime ads in the news columns for Dan Rice's Great World's Fair and Combination Shows which played the village on July 6. Neither paper ran display ads.

The *Erie Republican Record* on July 1, carried the following: "The biggest 25¢ show on earth at Erie, July 6. "Bring the children to see the great free exhibition at 12:30 noon. Erie, July 6."

"Thirty star performers with Dan Rice's old time show, Erie, July 6, tickets 25¢."



THE GREAT SHOW AS SEEN LEAVING SAN FRANCISCO FOR SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, OCTOBER 17, 1891.

Illustration from the 1892 Sells Bros. newspaper courier. Pfening Archives.

"Coming the Great World's Fair and Combination show, the only big show that will be in Erie this year. Tickets 25¢, Erie, July 6."

"Don't miss Dan Rice's old time shows. Erie, July 6, tickets 25¢."

"The best performing dogs in the world are with World's Fair Shows, Erie, July 6."

"Four fancy clowns, more tumblers, more lady performers with the World's Fair Show than all others combined. Erie, July 6, tickets 25¢."

The *Erie Sentinel*, which also published on July 1, advertised: "The Great World's Fair combined show will be at Erie July 6th. Tickets 25 cents."

"The only big show that will be in Erie this year, is the old time Dan Rice's, July 6th."

"Grand free show will take place on the show lot 12:30 noon, July 6th."

"Don't fail to bring the children to see the Grand Free Exhibition that will take place on the show lot at 12:30 noon, July 6th."

"By a pool of managers this will be the only big show in Erie this year, don't miss seeing it, July 6th."

"Dan Rice the oldest showman in the United States, will be with the biggest 25 cent show on earth, Erie, July 6th."

"More fun, more laughable acts, more funny clowns, than all other shows combined, Erie, July 6th. Tickets 25 cents."

"Thirty star performers, \$5,000 dog circus, four funny clowns, Jepo, the lady's pet, are all with the big show, Erie, July 6th. Tickets 25 cents."

"More male and female performers, the best trained dogs and monkeys, than any other traveling in one line, will exhibit at Erie, July 6th. Tickets 25 cents."

Apparently the editor of the *Record* did

not attend the show for he reported that, "A tented show was in town Wednesday afternoon and evening. Fair crowds were in attendance and we learn that the performance consisted of acrobatic and trapeze performances, etc., was fairly good."

The *Sentinel* was a little more informative: "The dog and monkey show minus the dogs and monkeys was fairly attended. A few attenuated jokes with whiskers and a very good trapeze performer was all there was of the 'greatest show on earth.'"

Neither paper confirmed the presence or absence of

\*\*\*\*\*

Dan Rice.

All circuses quoted praise from the press in far away towns when announcing a coming engagement, but few could equal Sells Brothers' Enormous United Shows: "Returning From Its Tremendous, Triumphant Foreign Tour of 20,000 Miles."

"If Messrs. Sells Brothers' Mammoth Circus is merely regarded as a stupendous advertisement for America, from which enterprising land they hail, or whether it is regarded as a startling revelation in this class of entertainment, in either case it must be pronounced a brilliant success.--Melbourne [Australia] *Daily Age*."

"An exhibition manifestly worthy of its American reputation and the extensive promises with which it came upon Australia.--Sydney *Daily Telegraph*."

"It is easily seen that Sells' Circus deserves its reputation, and is fully worthy of the biggest patronage the public can bestow.--Melbourne *Daily Herald*."

"The cream of circus talent of the world.--Sydney *Daily Star*."

The first exhibitions of the Kansas tour of 1892, were given in Great Bend on Monday, July 25. All three Great Bend papers carried ads two-columns by the length of the page proclaiming the Sells brothers' intent to give the public, "More for the Money Than Was Ever Heard Of Presented in More than the Magnitude and Elegance Which Astonished the Antipodes."

All Kansas farm boys were, of course, familiar with the Antipodes.

A conspicuous feature was the "Three Most Enormous Tigers Ever Known. Any one of which is big enough to swallow any other."

All of the ads were crammed with



words which said nothing and named no names.

"A Hundred Artists of World Wide Repute. The Prophet's Sons in superhuman feats. The Royal Gymnast Marvels of Japan, bright, golden vision fresh from fairy realms. An Elf-Land playground for the little folks. A startling Tournament of Lofty Leaps. The very air alive with Darling Deeds. A Ceaseless Carnival of harmless fun. Sensations till there is no room for more. None but the greatest riders will appear. None save the finest Gymnasts are engaged. There is No Space for an Inferior Act. And not an inch to spare the Commonplace. No Equal to it can be organized. No Other Bear Its Fabulous Expense. No Other Pays One-half Such Salaries."

Handouts appeared in all papers relating the show's tremendous success in Australia. The Great Bend *Register* ran its share of handouts, but on July 7 published a few opinions of its own: "The circus is coming. It is always on hand when the country is blessed with a good harvest, and is happily absent when the country is in poor financial condition. It always draws an immense crowd; and the people come knowing that they will see nothing but what has been exhibited under like mammoth tents hundreds of times before. Circuses are getting to be stale shows, yet the people crowd to them. Their big newspaper advertisements and flaming posters attract and every one knows that everybody else will be there and each goes to see the crowd of people, more than the stale performances under the tents."

One extensive handout appeared in every town played and in many towns that were by-passed.

"A GROSS FRAUD JUSTLY EXPOSED. Sells Brothers, after Three Years of Forbearance and Patient Magnanimity, are Finally Forced to Expose and Protest Against the Fraudulent Appropriation and Shameful Abuse of Their Name and Titles by Hardened and Irresponsible Cheats. Plain Facts Which Fortify a Wholesome Public Warning.

"For the past twenty-one years we have been continuously and conspicuously before the people as owners and active managers of the exhibition which has ever borne our names. We have no interest whatever in, or connection with any other, directly or indirectly.

"Ten years ago we purchased our brother's entire interest in our present and only Show, which since that time has attained its conceded grandeur, excellence, popularity and international fame.

"All too frequently beggarly sharpers seek to victimize the public by hiding their infamous purposes and worthless

nakedness under the stolen names of honorable, established and noted enterprises, and to such abuse we have been so long subjected that we are at last, as a paramount duty to our patrons and ourselves, absolutely forced to make this moderate statement of facts.

"Things in themselves utterly insignificant sometimes become important through circumstances (sic) associations, and this, unfortunately for honest folks, is the case with the paltry and piratical pest which for the past three seasons has infested the country, and by theft, fraud and falsehood sought to participate in our success, and to make our pre-eminent commercial as well as amusement standing sponsor to its infamy and failure. The fact that we have been too long generously silent and elected to treat it with magnanimous contempt has but emboldened it to renewed and more brazen effrontery, and to continued counterfeiting, worse in its effects than the issuing of spurious money. It has long passed the uttermost limit of law and forbearance, and its fate shall be that of all sneaking, dirty and noxious vermin.

Sells Bros. Circus newspaper ad used in 1892. Pfening Archives.

"It first crawled, wronged and robbed under the name of 'Sells & Andress,' was sold at sheriff's sale at St. Joseph, Missouri, and a portion of it purchased by a resident of Topeka, Kansas, where it was taken, and whence it started last year under the name of 'Sells' London Olympian Show.' It failed a second time, and was again shipped to Topeka. Its unfortunate employees were brutally cheated out of their hard-earned wages, and were kept from starving by the city authorities at the public expense. Its resident, actual owner played a double role and doubly baffled its many creditors. When they sought to hold it they were informed that he had leased it; when they appealed to him they were coolly told that he had no

interest in it. The fact that we own considerable property in Topeka, and had wintered our show there was craftily utilized to conceal the fraud and involve us in the opprobrium of repudiation.

"This season the montebank cadaver has been resurrected under the title of 'Sells & Rentfrew's,' (sic) and a few cast-off cages hired from the Wallace show to represent a menagerie. Rentfrew never had a circus, wherefore it may be readily inferred what his contribution to the stupendous whole amounts to. Taking advantage of our absence in Australia, this last tented Octopus gathered all our titles verbatim within the embrace of its slimy suckers, and thus masked is repeating its raids, and impudently wandering to a bankrupt's death. Having borrowed a decent livery to serve the devil in will not save it, but we naturally and indignantly object to such a ring tramp going about dressed in our clothes to swindle the unwary, and in some instances to bring discredit born of misapprehension upon our high and well-known reputation, so carefully guarded and maintained for nearly a quarter of a century. There is but one legitimate Sells Brothers' Show and its founders and sole owners are, Respectfully your obd't servants, Ephriam Sells, Lewis Sells, Peter Sells."

The Great Bend *Barton County Democrat* ran a handout purportedly quoting a story in the *Melbourne Age* which presents an interesting description of the act of the show's Arab troupe.

"Decidedly one of the strongest and most fascinating displays was given by the troupe of Arabs.

These were led into the arena by their chiefs, and after a preliminary war dance same surprising feats in the art of handling weapons are given. Some attack each other with the Arab creeses (sic), others with swords, and whilst these latter contests were going forward there were not a few amongst the audience who held their breath. The men were armed with sword and buckler, and they engaged in combat with the seeming ferocity that characterizes combats in the

FROM ITS AUSTRALIAN TRIUMPH  
TO EXHIBIT,  
In All Its Millionaire Perfection, at  
28th St. and Base Ball Park,  
LOUISVILLE,  
Saturday, Sept. 17,  
**SELLS  
BROTHERS'  
BIG SHOW  
OF THE  
WORLD!**



Only Stupendous Taming Australian Exhibit,  
and Borneo Hippodrome, and other Shows  
are, Only Giant Hippopotami, Trio of Most  
Tremendous Tigers, Biggest Circus on  
Earth, Only Tribe of Wild Bedouin Warrior  
Athletes, Only Darkest Africa Aquarium,  
Antipodean Aviary, the Olympian Stage of  
Old, Only Royal Japanese Troupe, All-  
around Gymnasium, Children's Fairyland Frolics,  
Grotesque Carnival, Arabian Nights  
Romances, Spectacular Pageants to Music,  
superb Five Holiday Displays.

Acknowledged Greatest in  
Two Great Empires.

A Bridge of Wonders Span-  
ning the Pacific.

Every Act as Pictured.  
Every Attraction as De-  
scribed.

Every promise fulfilled. It has made the  
greatest journey of its kind. Most daring  
feat of private enterprise. Whole railroad  
trains of vast and novel shows. Great  
steamship loads of strangely curious things.



blows fall on the steel bucklers of the fighters like hail, and when it is said that the slightest mistake with the shield must mean a mortal wound—for the swords are as keen and sharp as ever used in an Arab fray—the extreme skill of the wielders can be estimated. But the eyes of the swarthy warriors are as true and their hands as sure as the steel of their swords, and never a breathing pause took place in the lightning exchange of blows. They run scarcely any risk, for they are warriors of the desert, and the descendants of a long line of warriors who have been trained to these games from childhood; but all the same it

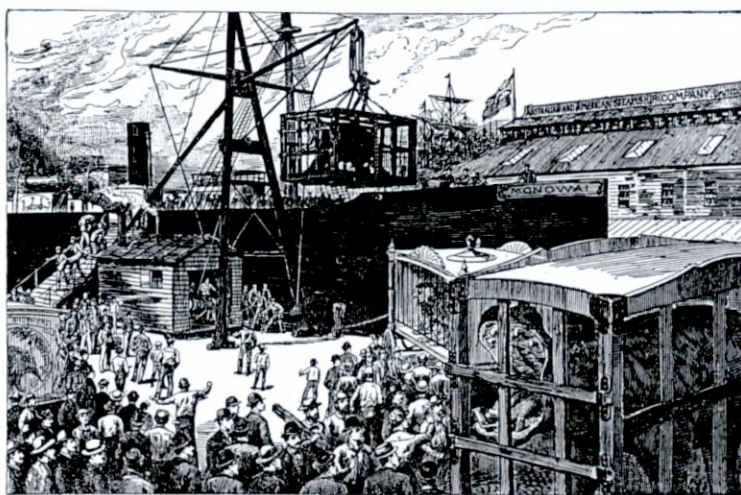
is highly exciting for the spectators to watch. There are some other feats by these Arabs almost as wonderful. One of them will take up the long rifle that they use, and by one finger twirl it round and round at such a rate that it is almost impossible to tell there is anything in his hand; whilst another would perform the same feat with the rifle unbalanced on the back of the elbow. Then again they are splendidly lithe, and all marvelous acrobats, whilst their strong man can bear ten of them on his shoulders, and when he is not doing that he would run down a horse with a moderate start. One noticeable thing about these wonderful men is that the bulkiest of them does not exceed 11 stone in weight, whilst the majority would perhaps scale 8 to 9 stone. Yet they are not only as lithe as panthers but as powerful as bulls, and a striking contrast to the bone and brawn of our own athletes."

Circus day in Great Bend was a huge success according to the *Democrat*: "The performing seals were voted the best thing in Sells Bros.' show."

"The large crowd in town on circus day is estimated at from 5,000 to 6,000 people. The showmen said there were over 4,000 in attendance in the afternoon exhibition."

"For the large crowd in town Monday, there was very little disorderly conduct. Not one arrest was made and there were few cases of intoxication, none of them unruly or disorderly."

"Sells Bros. show was, in our judgment, all that it advertised. Its parade was the best that ever traversed the streets of Great Bend, and it inspired not only the admiration of the vast hosts of people on the streets, but confidence in the show, and as a consequence the afternoon and evening en-



UNLOADING SELLS BROTHERS' FAMOUS PAIR OF GIANT LIVING HIPPOPOTAMI AT THE GOVERNMENT DOCKS AT SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, NOVEMBER 14, 1891.

Illustration from the 1892 Sells Bros. newspaper courier. Pfening Archives.

tertainments were well attended and greatly appreciated."

The July 30 *Hutchinson Clipper* without revealing its source reported that, "Nearly 8,000 people attended Sells Bros.' circus in Great Bend last Monday. The receipts were over \$5,000."

The Great Bend *Barton County Beacon* ran an intriguing short paragraph July 28, and never explained the situation: "Sells Bro's lost three of their men at Trinidad,

"Just returned from Australia" was added to many of the Sells Bros. posters used in 1892. Pfening Archives.



Colorado. One was killed by the cars and two were killed by the police."

The *El Dorado Republican* praised the exhibitions of July 27: "Sells Brothers' Circus. The performance given by Sells Bros.' two ring circus in this city Wednesday was the best that has been here for a long time and undoubtedly establishes the fact that it is not the 'one horse' Sells circus that is traveling through the country, but the original Sells Bros. that has been traveling for a number of years. Early in the morning the people began to arrive from the country and every train brought many eager sightseers. At 11 o'clock the streets were

jammed with people to see the parade and they were not disappointed, as it was well worth seeing. The menagerie consists of twenty-nine cages of rare and royal beasts, birds and reptiles, among them many choice specimens lately brought from Australia and the East Indies. The circus performance was above the average and they introduced some extraordinary feats. The circus people, as a whole, were not cranky, like the average showmen, but were very pleasant and accommodating, and especially is this true of the press representatives, Col. Chas. Seeley and Chas. Stow. The circus was free from the usual 'fakes' that follow to skin the people, and the whole affair went off in first class style."

The press department worked over time in describing the Sells Brothers' conquest of Australia, and the Herculean accomplishments in surmounting insurmountable obstacles. In the eyes of the press department, the indomitable brothers were not ordinary men.

One of the worst disasters occurred before the ships were unloaded at Sydney. The story was sent to the American papers in advance of the show's return to the United States. The *Topeka Daily Capital* ran the handout on June 1.

"WITHOUT A HORSE. Sells' Circus Was Obligated to Play at Sydney, Australia."

"During the recent tour of Australia by Sells Brothers' circus a very unfortunate thing happened at Sydney. Notwithstanding the fact that the sworn testimony of two veterinary surgeons were procured at San Francisco to the perfect health and condition of the circus horses they were all quarantined for alleged glanders and not one could be used."

"Charles Stow, press agent for Sells'



circus, said in an interview regarding the performance in Sydney: 'A circus without a horse would seem like a firmament without a sun, and yet to the amazement of the amusement world we exhibited for three weeks in Sydney to immense audiences without introducing a single equestrian or hippodramatic act. Our grand entree would have been a novelty in San Francisco. Our chariots were hauled about the arena and hand shoved along by elephants.'

"I do not believe that any other management on earth would have had the nerve and enterprise to attempt exhibiting under such discouraging circumstances.

"The horses we took over being quarantined, we purchased 100 additional head in Sydney, rented the agricultural ground, staked out a temporary track and proceeded to break them for our business. We succeeded so well that we were enabled to present a very respectable programme of races at our first stand out of Sydney, and everywhere the big show went it created a furor of wonder and excitement. Its magnitude and excellence of discipline were acknowledged by the entire press of Australia, and the long and hazardous trip was an additional success in establishing for us a most enviable reputation abroad. The horses we purchased in the colonies were sold prior to our returning to America.

"While it would be a most unfortunate time to take any amusement venture to Australia, whenever anything of merit does go there from America it may depend upon receiving a hospitable and impartial welcome."

"Sells' circus will arrive in San Francisco in a week or two."

Veterinarians today are unfamiliar with glanders. The disease was an infection of the respiratory system resulting in coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. Generally, the disease was fatal. At best the horse was rendered unable to work and was usually exterminated. In Kansas destruction of the animal was required by law.

The huge success claimed for the Australian tour was reported in the March 28 *Topeka State Journal*: The show turned people away at almost every performance and the showmen say they have been making money hand over fist."

The glorious struggle and the triumph of American ingenuity was told in a handout appearing in the *El Dorado*

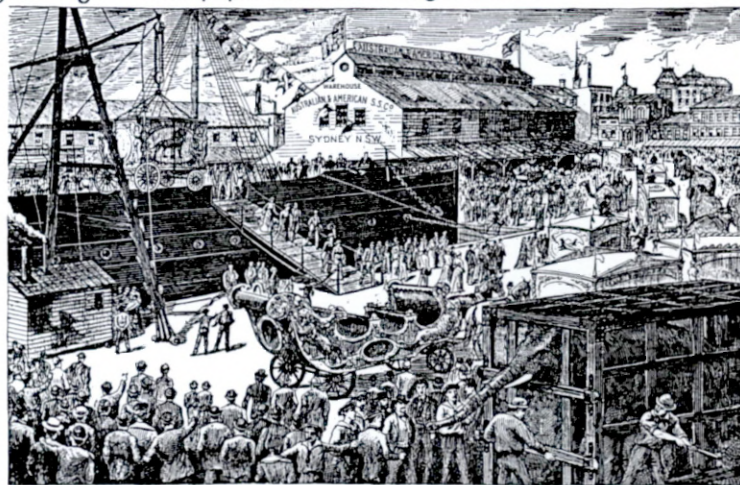


The 1892 Sells Bros. posters were printed by Strobridge. Pfening Archives.

*Walnut Valley Times* on July 22: "PLUCK AMERICANS ABROAD.

"Sells Brothers' now literally world-famous and awfully big combination of Australian Wonders, Hippodrome, Circus, Menagerie, Aviary, Aquarium, Fairyland Frolics and Highway Pageantry, under the personal management of its noted owners, is to exhibit at El Dorado on July 27th, and after the gigantic, successful and indomitable manner in which they have represented American enterprise and demonstrated American pluck

Illustration from the 1892 Sells Bros. newspaper courier. Pfening Archives.



THE GREAT SHOW'S TRIUMPHANT ARRIVAL AND TREMENDOUS RECEPTION AT SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, NOVEMBER 12, 1891.

abroad, every citizen should resolve himself into a special committee of one and form in hollow square to receive them, while the band plays 'See the Conquering Hero Comes,' and 'Yankee Doodle,' with 'Star Spangled Banner' variations. Amid the booming of the big press runs, and the cheers of thousands of well-wishers they sailed from San Francisco last October for a six-months' tour in far-away Australia, undertaking the most stupendous, hazardous and daring amusement venture ever chronicled; with the prestige of having taught an insatiate eastern monopoly, organized against the interests alike of the public and the poor printer, a most wholesome and drastic eighty thousand dollar lesson, and deservedly endorsed by the American newspapers as no other exhibition of the kind ever was. Their arrival at Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, on the 12th of November last, was made the occasion of a tremendous popular demonstration, and they were most cordially welcomed by both press and public. But through some apparently trivial and unforeseen circumstance 'the best laid plans of mice

and men gang; aft aglee,' and the implacable malevolence and inconsistent, bitter hostility of one ignorant, and it was generally believed venal, petty tyrant, strong to work evil and injustice through permanence of position, cast a most ominous cloud over this sunlit reception, and threatened the enterprise with utter ruin. The official horse-doctor of New South Wales, had it in his temporary power to enforce quarantine against the big show to an almost unlimited extent, and this he proceeded without mercy or justification, to instantly and most arbitrarily do. Failing in the declared purpose of compelling the show to return to America on the 'Monowai,' he quarantined Moore Park, where it was to exhibit, not only against horses but against human beings, actually

murdered at night ten magnificent horses purchased by Mr. Peter Sells in Sydney before the arrival of the show, which had not been brought in contact in any way, with the rest of the stock, and which he had given the management express permission to use. The balance of the horses he quarantined at Shark Island in Sydney Harbor, whence they were sent home at the expiration of four months, arriving at San Francisco as entirely well and sound as when they first left that city, with the sworn certificate of two of its leading veterinary surgeons to their



perfectly healthy condition. He, furthermore, destroyed the show's store of feed, wantonly damaged its harness and trappings under pretext of disinfecting them, slushed the poles and circus appurtenances with some sort of an alleged germ destroyer, swept the show ground with a besom of fire, charged an extortionate sum for these and other like devices to ruin the show, and even after it had left Sydney attempted to collect a bill against it of over one thousand dollars for disinfectants at two dollars and a half per gallon, and the consummation of other sanitary humbugging and persecution. He resorted to every ostentatious and unscrupulous device to inflame the public apprehension and hostility. That he did not entirely succeed was due to the good sense of the people, who saw through the trick and roundly denounced it, and to the final interference of his superior, the Minister of Mines, who, upon being appealed to, peremptorily raised the quarantine against individuals, and permitted the show to open without its horses. He also refunded half the cost of the horses slaughtered, which was a conclusive admission that they had been illegally killed.

"The news of these complications was telegraphed home, and the return of the great show in humiliation and defeat was generally anticipated. But here resulted an experiment whose splendid audacity and miraculous success filled the show world with unqualified amazement, and proved the Sells Brothers are made of heroic stuff. Although a circus without a horse is much like a firmament without a sun, they dared to and did open their Australian season without a horse, and for a three-week's season in Sydney not a single riding or hippodrome act was introduced. The result amply justified their audacious courage and self-reliance. So varied and really superior were the manifold attractions of the show, even as thus curtailed and shorn of many a fair proportion, that its immense canvasses were continuously crowded by the most enthusiastic audiences ever assembled south of the equator, and the doors had to be closed repeatedly against eager throngs. Without a dissenting voice, the press of Sydney, and it is composed of mighty independent and candidly critical newspapers, pronounced the exhibition in comparably big, elegant and honest. The *Daily Herald* said: 'The enormous marquee was crowded in every part by an enthusiastic assemblage of sight-seers, and the variety and merit of the attractions offered seemed to fully compensate those present for

their unavoidable disappointment.'

"The *Daily News* said: 'The Messrs. Sells are to be congratulated on the very promising beginning which they have made. In the difficulties by which they have been beset they have had a genuine claim on the sympathies of the Australian public; but though sympathy is, of course, all very well in its way, it is much more gratifying to be able to record the fact that the support which the Messrs. Sells have now received so good an earnest of, can be looked for on the actual merits of their show.'

"The *Daily Star* said: 'By everyone who has an honest desire to know of the success of a worthy and deserving enterprise it will be known with feelings of gratification that the opening of Sells Brothers' great show last night was the biggest occasion ever known in the colonial history of circus. This statement will be assessed at its true value when the past success and displays of other big concerns of the kind are taken into consideration.'

The story continued with quotes from the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Echo*, both of which continued in the same vein as the above reports.

hard times and general business depression scored a continuous triumph.

The admiration and respect in which they are held by the grand young Empire of the Southern Seas ought to and will be appreciated at home, for the genuine American most delights to honor the man

Another lithograph used by Sells Bros. Circus in 1892. Pfening Archives.



who best represents his country and her institutions abroad."

According to the press reports during the season of 1892, the Sells brothers had experienced a bonanza in Australia. The reports of attendance nearly always mentioned turn-aways. Such crowds generate huge profits and the Sells brothers apparently wanted the world to believe that their Australian adventure had been a great financial success. The very effusiveness of the handouts is enough to encourage doubts as to the profitability.

The November 29, 1900 *Topeka State Journal* during the divorce trial of Peter Sells in Columbus, Ohio, reported: "Sells said that the circus did not have but three winning seasons in twelve years. During the winter of 1888-89, it made enough to keep it going until the summer of 1899, when the show cleared \$160,000. Of this one-fourth was his share. He paid out \$10,000 for his share of the expense of wintering the show, and in the spring sold his interest for \$24,000.

"In reply to questions Sells said that the show never struck a trial balance during the years he was with it until after the Barnum & Bailey combination was formed. Previous to that time they had proceeded on a system of dead reckoning. After all the bills were paid, the surplus, if there was any, represented the profits of the partners, just as any deficit represented their loss."

The November 30, 1900 *Journal* carried the statement that: "During the 10 years from 1889 to 1899 during which the show made no money, Lewis and Peter borrowed \$65,000 to meet their current expenses."

If one can believe Peter Sells testifying under oath, it is apparent that the glorious Australian adventure was a loss far from glorious.

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Walter L. Main's Enormous Railroad Shows in 1892 was remarkable for many things. One fact that amazed the public of every town was the total absence of fakirs, cheats and gamblers. The Main aggregation was as much of a "Sunday School" show as Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows, and like the Ringling show, was everywhere applauded for presenting every advertised feature and more. The quality of the horses was admired by all. The equipment, wagons and costumes were all clean and sparkling. The performance was universally cited for excellence.

One of the more amazing facts of Main's season of 1892 was the routing of the show. The season, which began April 23, in Geneva, Ohio, included 130 towns, and the amazing fact is that 52 of the towns--40%--were in Kansas.



The earliest Kansas date was Galena on August 12; the last was Sedan on November 9. The show closed at Paragould, Arkansas on November 19.

The July 29 Galena *Times* carried an ad that appeared, with slight variations, in all of the towns played. The features mentioned were always the same. Heading the ad was a declaration common to every show on the road: "The only BIG SHOW To be here This Year, Galena, Friday, August 12. Walter L. Main's Enormous RAILROAD SHOWS! 3 Big Circuses 3 Big Rings 3. Chas. W. Fish, World's Champion Bare Back Rider. The Great Cousins. Fisher Brothers. Ten Great Clowns. The Becketts. Kakama Great Japs. The 4 Walton Bros. Mexis, the Rifle Queen. The Only Judges. James West and wife. Twenty Noted Leapers. MIMNETTE, The Greatest of Long Skirt Dancers. The Pastimes, Sports and Games of the Ancient Roman Hippodrome. Two and Four Horse Chariot Races. Elephant Races. Male Flat Races. Standing Races. Female Jockey Races. Male and Female Hurdle Races. 21 Horses Reined and Ridden by one man. Double 5-Horse Tandem Race, 5 foot Hurdle. Two Colossal Menageries! Zebras, Lions, Tigers, Leopards, Hyenas, Pumas. Pair Royal Bengal Tigers! Flock of Ostriches! Rhinoceros, White Bears, Elands, Sea Lions, Seals, Horned Horses and 1,500 Rare and Costly Animals. Grand Gala Day Free STREET PARADE! One Day Only! Doors open 1 and 7, Begins 2 and 8 p.m.

"All Railroads sell Cheap Excursion Tickets to the Big Show."

The report of the *Times* following circus day could have been taken from the columns of almost any Kansas newspaper in 52 towns.

"Last Friday, Walter L. Main's mammoth show entertained the Galena people. It was a clean show, and every single feature promised on their bills was given at their show. Many of our people who had seen the Sells Brothers show at Joplin, a few days before, pronounced Main's a better one. Everybody was pleased. One especial feature was their fine stock of horses, the best trained we ever saw; and another was that there was no robber schemes or fakirs connected with nor allowed to follow the show."

Editors in the 1880s always complained about advertising money spent on banners worn by elephants in circus parades. The same money spent on newspaper ads would, they believed, have a more lasting effect, especially for the editor. The Main show sold elephant advertising in every town, but it no longer seemed to disturb the publishers. The most frequent response was to compliment the advertiser on his cleverness. Perhaps the editors had

learned that there is no good will in sour grapes.

"One of the special features of the show parade Monday [August 15]," according to the Columbus *Modern Light*, "was that of the elephants carrying banners advertising the dry goods house of J. C. Little. One of them read: 'J. C. Little owns all the elephants in town to-day.'"

Walter L. Main as pictured in his 1892 route book. Pfening Archives.

The banners were later hung from the dome of the big top. Prior to the exhibitions the Columbus *Advocate* ran a hand out that was used repeatedly in Kansas: "The Circus. Brazil [Indiana] *Times*, May 31, 1892. 'Walter L. Main's circus here yesterday drew a large crowd. The affair was much larger than expected and was meritorious throughout. There was a pleasurable absence of fakirs, tough characters, three-card monte men and such dangerous nuisances that usually congregate around a circus. The performance was good and much appreciated.' Columbus, August 15."

Quotes from out of town newspapers were frequently used in circus advertising and were generally much abused. Many quotes were from towns where the quotes had never played. Others were from seasons long past. And many were nothing more than what the editor would have said had he thought of it as much as did the circus press agent who said it for him.

In the Kansas tour Main's press department quoted newspapers from at least 21 different cities. The amazing thing was that the show had exhibited in every one of the cities in the season of 1892. Even more amazing, the show used quotes from Kansas towns where they had performed but a few days previous.

The *Advocate* reported that: "Geo. S. Cole, the old time show man was here with Main's circus last Monday and gave us a friendly call. Mr. Cole has been in the show business long enough to know the advantages of and appreciate newspapers, and consequently he has the respect and friendship of the fraternity. To him we are indebted for favors and courtesies extended at the show."

The Cherryvale *Republican*, concerning the exhibitions of August 17, reported

that: "George S. Cole, the press agent for Walter L. Main's show was almost frantic with sciatic rheumatism while in this city. He says he has had two attacks a year for twenty years. He is a genial fellow, notwithstanding his affliction."

"Frank Prewitt joined the circus band," the *Republican* reported, "and will make a tour of the west with the show."

After the exhibitions of August 19, the Eureka *Democratic Messenger* published the following:

"The Circus. Walter L. Main's circus is a good one. It thoroughly satisfied the large crowd in attendance.

The parade was good, there being more than a hundred handsome horses in line. The menagerie was rather larger than those that usually visit this city. The circus performance was strictly first class.

The hippodrome races, the trained horses and

elephants, the trapeze performance and several other features that might be mentioned were very fine.

"One of the most creditable characteristics of the show was the complete absence of all crooks, swindlers and confidence men of all kinds. No swindling games of any kind are permitted in connection with the show and Mr. Main informed the sheriff and city marshall that in case they found any sort of swindling in progress anywhere about the grounds that he, himself, would swear out the warrant for the arrest. So well pleased are our people with Walter L. Main's show that when it comes to Eureka again the attendance will be even larger than it was last Friday."

The *Messenger* also noted that: "Charley Cullison, who was formerly employed in E. N. Bailey & Co's drug store, surprised his old-time acquaintances Tuesday by dropping into town unexpectedly. He is now employed in the advertising department of Walter L. Main's circus, which is to exhibit here to-day."

Advertisements always mentioned "MINNETTE, The Greatest of Long Skirt Dancers," but in one advertisement, just below a superb engraving of a Spanish dancer, was, "CYRENE, The Long Skirt Contortion Spanish Dancer."

The Eureka *Herald* ran an advertisement dominated by a cut of "The Wild Man with Lions Claws on Hands and Feet





and a Lions Mane. Part Man Part Lion. Captured in the Mountains of Mexico." The Man-Lion was depicted as covered with hair and disemboweling a huge bear with the claws of his hands.

An advertisement in the August 5 *Moline Republican* announced, "The lumber in the circus bill boards—about 5,000 feet—will be for sale after August 20th at \$15 per thousand feet.—Buirgan." The lumber was sold well before circus day.

Previous to the exhibitions of Monday on August 22 the *Barber County Index* on August 10 had a few comments: "And now the show bill has come to afflict the eye and inaugurate dog days.

"Bring your butter and eggs just before the show, on the 22nd. They will command a better price.

"The show will be located on the vacant lot south of the depot.

"Sixteen bill posters of Main's circus registered at the Osage Sunday and Monday."

After circus day the *Index* related: "The hayseed farmers alliance candidate in the circus was well executed and highly appreciated.

"The ladies dinner at the Cook block was well patronized Monday.

"The hotels were crowded to their utmost Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

"Many of our business men are very justly complaining that the complimentaries promised for putting up bills in their windows never materialized." This was undoubtedly an oversight and the comment is the only derogatory report of the entire Kansas tour.

The exhibitions of August 23, at Harper, were marred by an accident, according to the *Sentinel*: "Isaac Case and little daughter fell from a top seat at the circus last Tuesday, and were considerably hurt. The showmen paid the doctor and hired a rig and took them home." Fortunately, the Case family reached home without further difficulty, but "While returning, lightning struck the carriage and tore the top."

The editor of the *Iola Register* was a man of great compassion and wisdom. A week before the show he wrote: "We don't know anything about the circus we advertise this week, but we hope it is a good one. A good circus is worth coming miles to see—and so is a bad one, for that matter. A circus is a circus, and we are always sorry for anyone who can't or won't go."

August 26 was circus day in Iola, and the *Register* reported that: "One of the pleasantest sights we saw on circus day was the dozens of people eating their dinner and lounging about under the shade of the trees in the Park."

An engraving of an odd fish-shaped bandwagon appeared in the Burlington *Nonpareil* on August 19 advertising Main's exhibitions of August 29. It is the opinion of Stuart Thayer and Fred Dahlinger, Jr., that the wagon was an artist's flight of fancy. Dahlinger did find an illustration in the New York *Clipper* depicting a similar wagon, drawn by goats, in an advertisement for Prof. Nap La Grande's Humpty Dumpty Dog and Goat Troupe.

The exhibitions of September 1, at Cot-

ter and surprise and call forth exclamations of approval and delight.

"This very large and complete establishment requires a mammoth five center-pole tent to accommodate three rings and a race course, in which are given a series of performances seldom equalled and never excelled, while the menagerie is exhibited in a three center-pole tent as large as the average circus pavilion.

"To transport this great establishment requires twenty railroad cars, consisting of sleepers, box and flats, built expressly for Mr. Main. These cars are conveniently arranged for the several purposes for which they are used, the sleepers being supplied with every convenience necessary for the comfort of the performers and heads of the various departments. There are nearly two hundred people connected with the show.

"One of the remarkable features connected with the exhibition is the almost human sagacity displayed by the dogs, goats, horses, elephants, etc., showing a degree of training never before equalled. No forcing or coaxing is required to make them perform their tricks, but at the word of command, or at the slightest sign, on the part of the trainer, the trick is performed with a degree of intelligence that is actually surprising.

"Walter L. Main's mammoth show is different from all others in many other respects. Every thing advertised is performed and the principal acts were given in the rings just as pictured on the bills.

There are no fake or gambling games allowed on or about the grounds. Good order prevails and visitors are treated with the greatest courtesy.

"Walter L. Main, the projector and exclusive owner and manager of this mammoth organization, is only about 30 years old, yet his success has been marvelous, and he attributes it to the fact that he aims to give all that he advertises and more too, and a determination to have nothing but the best in everything."

The Manhattan *Mercury* complained that on circus day, September 8, "the procession of the circus last week that traveled over the Blue River bridge, and the damage thereto by the heavy loads, was greater than a year's use by our citizens for whom it was built. It would have been better for Manhattan and the taxpayers of Riley and Pottawatomie counties to have permitted the show to exhibit in the city free of charge and paid them \$25 besides than to have our bridge used as it was last week."

The *Mercury* did not blame the Main

## Always the Best! Always the Biggest! MANHATTAN, THURSDAY, SEPT. 8



## WALTER L. MAIN'S ENORMOUS RAILROAD SHOWS!

### 3 Big Circuses! 3 Big Rings! 3

Main newspaper ad with odd shaped wagon in the Manhattan, Kansas *Republic* of September 1, 1892. Kansas State Historical Society.

tonwood Falls, filled the *Chase County Leader* with some details of the Main tour. Not all the news was good: "A colored boy named Stewart was kicked in the face by one of the circus horses last Thursday, receiving a severe injury.

"One of the performers while arranging the trapeze, last Thursday, fell and dislocated his wrist, and two of the lady performers were sick and unable to leave their berths, which necessitated the omission of several features of the performance."

The September 8 *Leader* reported the following: "Walter L. Main's Big Show.

"The statement is often heard: 'There is nothing new in the line of circus performances.' That cannot apply to the immense establishment which exhibited in this place last Thursday. Nearly everything from start to finish was new or presented in such a manner as to cause won-





show, but pointed a finger at the local politicians: "The first remedy to this wrong lies with the city council, to put the license fee down to a reasonable figure and ask every traveling concern, women base ballists, and all the rest, to exhibit in the city limits where the police have control."

The circus was good news to one citizen of Manhattan. "John Pipher sold considerably over 100 melons circus day."

The *Pratt County Republican* of Pratt, Kansas on October 27 reported the exhibitions of October 24 in words that might have been printed in any town on the Kansas route: "The people of this county were out in full force on Monday to attend Main's big show. Barber, Kiowa and Stafford counties sent fair delegations also. By ten o'clock a.m., the streets of

The Walter L. Main Circus parade in Xenia, Ohio on May 18, 1892. Pfening Archives.

Pratt were almost blocked with a moving mass of humanity and by eleven o'clock there must have been 5,000 to 6,000 people in town. The parade occurred at about 11 o'clock a.m., and was a very creditable showing. The horses and stock accompanying this show were excellent in kind and condition, and it is seldom, even in the older states that any show is seen with so many well-bred and well groomed horses accompanying it. These horses contained several thorough-bred Arabian stallions, and they were beauties. The different bands also made good music and were a noticeable feature of the parade.

"The elephants, lions, tigers, panthers, etc., each had a place in the procession, and were good specimens of their kind. At 11 o'clock the curiosity side show opened the doors on the ground near the Rock Island depot and at one o'clock p.m. the big menagerie and circus began its performance. The tent of the big show was filled to overflowing with people by half past one o'clock p.m., and at a moderate estimate it is probable that there were between 4,000 and 5,000 at the afternoon performance.

"The two hours spent under the big tent were spent in an entertaining manner between the different features and changes in the program, all of which came before the people with all the system of clockwork. The six well trained Arabian horses, the nine trained dens, the trapeze performances, the tumbling, chariot races, running races, cavalcade, the [word or words missing] were prominent and pleasing features of the exhibition, and when taken together constituted a first-class show. Walter L. Main will always have a good name as a showman in this part of the state for he gives one of the best performances of any show in the west."

In the season of 1892, Ringling Brothers shared the pinnacle of public esteem with Walter L. Main's Enormous Railroad Show.

*Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Topeka, Kansas.*

# WANTED

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\$8.50 EA. / PLUS \$3.00 SHIPPING

**"SCREAMERS"** - recorded by Frederick Fennell and his 45 piece band in 1963, it's all circus and long unavailable! These classic tapes capture all the excitement of a live performance with numbers including -- Storm and Sunshine, The Screamer, Bennett's Triumphal, The Squealer, Robinson's Grand Entree Circus Bee and Rolling Thunder. Plus gallops -- Whips and Spur, Circus Days, The Big Cage and more. Each tape is a "must have" in any library of great circus music!

**CLYDE BEATTY RADIO PROGRAMS** -- Two nostalgic 1/2 hour programs from the early 50's with great Clyde Beatty adventures. One story is set in Darkest Africa and the other in Beatty's Winter Quarters. 60 minutes of radio magic!

### NOSTALGIA AUDIO

**1890'S MINSTREL SHOW** -- from the turn of the century, a nostalgic recreation of "TOWN HALL TONIGHT". It's all here with the opening march, the chorus, the banjo and bones, great solos and comedy with MR. INTERLOCUTOR and his END MEN! True American entertainment at it's best.



### 40 HORSE HITCH POSTER

A CLASSIC POSTER! - 1973 This marvelous half sheet proudly announces the return of the "FORTY" pulling the mighty Schlitz Bandwagon in the Milwaukee Circus Parade. Multi-colored design. Brings back memories of the classic, old style lithos! MINT. EA. \$13.00 (Shipping tube included)

The only book of its kind

### LIMITED EDITION!



by GIOVANNI IULIANI  
"DOCTOR IS THE  
BABY BORN  
NORMAL?"

NEARLY ALL  
MOTHERS ASK AS  
SOON AS THEY  
GIVE BIRTH!

THIS UNUSUAL PUBLICATION REVEALS  
THE WORLD OF THIS PLANET'S  
STRANGEST LIVING CREATURES.  
PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED WITH ACTUAL  
UNRETOUCHED PHOTOGRAPHS THAT  
WILL SEND YOU ON A JOURNEY INTO  
THE REALM OF GOD'S FORGOTTEN  
CHILDREN.

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Rare, colorful 8 1/2" X 11" sheets. All different including those gorgeous, ornate designs from the park's 1st season -- 1974. SET OF 4 \$6.50

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# Circus Life and Adventure of ADAM BARDY

Every so often, story books are written that tell of someone who has lived an interesting and adventurous life, and there are times that some local person may come along who has experienced such an adventure in his life's journey. Of local interest is the story of Adam Bardy, who began his "adventure" in 1915, at the age of eight, running away with the great Buffalo Bill Wild West Circus, when the Circus was playing in his home town of Webster, Mass.

This beginning adventure was of very short duration, as Adam met up with gypsy fortune tellers the very next day, and, in their generosity, they gave Adam trolley car fare money, and Adam returned home.

In Adam's teenage years, he lived with wood-choppers in shanties in the woods, and finally in a deserted farmhouse. At the age of seventeen, Adam joined the Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus. Other large and small circuses were to be Adam's life, until, in 1929, Adam met up with Kentucky Mountaineers, and the life of a bootlegger was to begin. A thrilling adventure as a big-time bootlegger was Adam's lot in life, until the Conn. State Police wiped out the operation. Adam escaped from custody, and a fugitive's existence lasting seven long years began. During this time, Adam learned all about fortune telling, a life he followed for many years. After that seven years, Adam gave up and turned himself in to the police. He went on to raising beautiful meat and show rabbits, and became New England's largest rabbit breeder. Then he went back to doing character readings, using palm readings and handwriting analysis by mail.

But, of all Adam's adventures, his memories of circus life were the best, including the opportunity to have had personal mends like the great Tom Mix, who joined the Sells-Floto Circus when Adam was with that circus in 1929, and Adam's interest in boxing, which his good friend Tom Mix really loved.

And now, as Adam lives his quiet life out in the country, he has written an interesting book that tells of his forty-seven years with his wonderful late wife, Ann, who was a devoted and loving mate. The story tells of what it was like to live with a fugitive and bootlegger husband all those years, and then of her passing in 1980. Adam recounts his loneliness for three years. Adam continues his story by telling how the palmistry reading of a young twenty-one year old girl blossomed into a wonderful friendship of true love and romance, as it can come to one who has lived an adventurous, interesting life. The story explains how, through deep faith in God, Adam could live this strange, unusual and interesting life, so full of excitement, and still remain the happy-go-lucky person he still is. Adam credits all this to the guiding hand of God.

The interesting life story of Adam includes that of his close companion, twenty-two year-old Terry Lyn Bates. Her story alone is well worth the price of the book, as one can see that age alone is not what counts, but the way we live our lives.

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of *Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy*, send check or money order for \$12.95 to:

**ADAM BARDY**

87 Alm Rd.

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